

Covering ground

New carpet tile contract a big win for agencies, towns, and Mother Nature

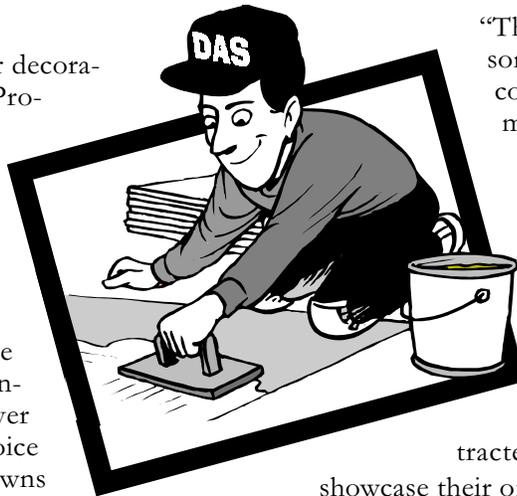
Last month, DAS Procurement Services finalized a contract that give state agencies and towns a new buying flexibility they'd never before had.

Striking a resounding blow for interior decoration, good taste, and ecology, DAS Procurement Services developed a unique contract for carpet tile installation. Using the fact that there were no past practices as a plus, they drew up the contract from scratch the way it would work best.

"The carpet tile contract is a new one for the state," said Carol Wilson, a contract specialist in Procurement. "It never existed before and offers a lot more choice and flexibility to state agencies and towns when ordering and installing carpeting."

Not only does the new contract give buyers an array of different types and styles of carpet tile, it gives them the option of buying new carpet tile with recycled content or completely recycled carpet. The contract also contains a means by which a building's existing carpet can be recycled

and reused, and provides an environmentally friendly alternative for disposal that will keep worn-out carpets out of the landfills.



"The buyers have freedom of choice," Wilson said, referring not only to the carpet's composition but its style, color, and even make.

"This contract represents most of the major commercial carpet tile manufacturers," she said, "it is a catalogue-type contract."

Wilson said there will be an open house some time in the coming months at which all of the contracted manufacturers will be available to showcase their offerings.

Representatives from agencies and towns are encouraged to attend, if for no other reason than to help the environment, and put to rest the reputation of government buildings as showrooms of identical state-issued steel desks and walls of institutional lime. ■

In This Issue

Uncommon Grounds

Agencies get the red carpet treatment. Or blue, or green... 1

Penny Wise

Jim Passier explains why RFPs are your friends. (No, really!) 2

Success Story

Y2K? Why not? The business is certainly there for state lab vendors 3

Money Clips

As always, on the money info and other spare change 4



PENNY WISE

RFPs, Revisited

In this, our first anniversary issue, I want to talk about the dreaded RFP. Yes, its those dreaded three words, the bane of a purchasing person's existence: the *Request for Proposal*. Its not so much the RFP that I want to discuss, although that's part of it - rather it's *who* is responsible for *what*? What is the role of Procurement Services?

To review, *RFP* and the term *competitive negotiation* are synonymous for a statutorily defined process. This procedure permits the state to acquire goods and services when a specification-based bid process will not lead to the proper result.

As its name implies, competitive negotiation permits negotiation to achieve the desired result. The RFP document, if properly constructed, describes a problem rather than rigid specifications. It will also contain broad general requirements and submission instructions for proposers, an explanation of the selection criteria that will be used to evaluate the proposals, and an overall time schedule.

In addition, special terms and conditions may be included. A team of knowledgeable customers assisted by a Procurement Services Contract Specialist evaluates proposals. Following evaluation, the state will negotiate the final proposal with the highest-ranked submission and a contract award will be made. Sounds pretty simple, what's the problem? Well, it centers on two conditions that are present in almost every RFP we receive.

First, the customer usually develops a document, in great detail, that concentrates on and emphasizes specifications rather than problem description. We tell the suppliers what we want instead of describing the problem we want to solve. In effect, we dictate the solution, implying that we know more about that than potential vendors. We do that because of our history and heritage. Those long years of writing detailed specs for low-bid awards are difficult to change, but it's not the way to write an RFP.

Second, many customers have a "more is better" mindset. When it comes to terms and conditions, we throw in the kitchen sink in the belief that it can't hurt. But it *does* hurt. Procurement Services has developed approved Terms and Conditions for RFPs as well as bids derived from statutes and regulations. We have to go through customer RFP documents and remove terms that negate or weaken state

terms and conditions or are simply redundant. Of course this adds to the processing time and irritates the customer since we are altering "their" document.

During the last year, we have created and processed a number of RFPs in three- to four-month time frames from start to contract award. This includes a month or more for the vendors to prepare responses and additional time for evaluation of the proposals and negotiation with the selected vendor. In these cases, customers approached us before they had started developing material. Working with our customers, we created an RFP schedule and moved into a "fast track" development mode. Document templates sped production of the RFP while we simultaneously identified evaluation teams and developed scoring criteria.

I admit, this can be an intense process and a serious time commitment is necessary. But we get it done quickly, allowing you to get on with acquiring and installing the product or service you have purchased.

See *RFPs*, page 4

PURCHASING POWER

*A publication of
DAS Procurement Services*

John G. Rowland
Governor

Barbara A. Waters
Commissioner

James Passier
Manager - Procurement Services

Michael Mansfield
Editor

*For more information about any of the articles in
Purchasing Power, contact us at:*

Phone: (860) 713-5095

Fax: (860) 713-7484

E-mail: Mike.Mansfield@po.state.ct.us

\$UCCESS \$TORY

Millennial Millions

Manufacturers Ink a Huge Contract to Safeguard State Labs

Only time will determine the significance of the year 2000's arrival. Some foresee a technological Armageddon. Others dismiss it as cyber-hype and a quick payday for computer consultants. Only one thing is certain - all the prophesying is becoming awfully annoying.

If the non-compliant computer-based machinery of our world is indeed fixing to commit a technological *suicide*, we can only hope that the scientific and laboratory equipment of the state's many laboratories will be spared. Thanks to an expansive Y2K upgrade contract coordinated by DAS Procurement Services, it appears that that equipment will be just fine.

Contract Specialist Susan Thomas remembered the chain of events and several players, companies, and products that make up this extremely involved deal.

"This was a major project since last summer when the Health Department approached me to get this together," she recalled. "In analytical chemistry, the Y2K situation makes chemists, Purchasing, and fiscal professionals come together to obtain equipment that will best fit the desired needs of the chemists while keeping costs in mind as a *major* factor."

The primary focus of the deal is the gas chromatography equipment used by the Department of Public Health Forensic Laboratory, Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, and State Police Laboratory - some of the biggest users of laboratory equipment. Thomas said many more could also use this contract supplement, "I also opened this to the cities and towns," she said.

Perkin Elmer, a Norwalk-based vendor already on state contract, received almost half of the \$1 million-plus contract. While inking a contract of that size was certainly a pleasure for Perkin Elmer Account Manager Joe Halloran, Halloran was quickest to sing the praises of Thomas and DAS' Thomas Delude, who assisted on the contract.

"My compliments go to them both," he said. "Words that come to mind are 'very thorough' and 'very professional.' It was an enjoyable experience to work with them throughout the process, they were very informative about the ongoing process of the requirements, always telling me what I needed to know to move along."

Other companies involved include Hewlett Packard and Canberra, another Connecticut company, involved in a smaller capacity.

"I visited all three sites - often more than once - with all the vendors to ensure fairness and to obtain a final listing or quote sheet," Thomas said.

Contract requirements were quite stringent. "We had to get what the chemists need to take them through and beyond 2000 with little or no problems at optimum costs," she said, adding that "timing was a major part of this deal - making sure warranty and final checks by the manufacturer carried us over into the 2000."

"DAS has been extremely helpful in this whole process."

Her efforts paid off, and earned effusive praise on her and DAS Procurement Services' behalf. "DAS has been extremely helpful in this whole process," said

Larry Henry, of the Health Department Laboratory. "Sue remained the focus person and worked with the agencies - her being a detail person enabled the project to go forward as smoothly as it has." Halloran agreed. "Unless you're right in the loop you can't realize how much work Sue did."

But as rewarding as their hard work on the contract may have been, Thomas doesn't sound as if she's upset that this transaction may be the last of its type she'll work on.

"Boy, am I glad I won't be here for Y3K laboratory equipment upgrade!" she joked.

\$



The DAS Procurement Learning Center is once again offering its popular *Introduction to Procurement Services for Vendors* course. The curriculum for this course is designed to give vendors practical information on how to do business with the State of Connecticut. Participants will gain an understanding of policies,

procedures, and resources; how to market products and services to state agencies; the Procurement Services web page, including the new Online Bidder Notification System; the state's plan to increase cooperative purchasing with Connecticut cities, towns, and school systems; E-Commerce; the Business CONN-connections/Set-Aside Program, and the Purchasing Card. The half-day course is being offered at the Department of Transportation facility at 2800 Berlin Turnpike in Newington on two dates: Monday March 15, and Monday March 29, from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. To enroll, please contact Patricia Griffin at 860-713-7484 or Lori Thomas at 860-713-5090. **S**



RFPs, continued from page 2

After all, that's why we go through this in the first place.

To sum it all up, just keep in mind that potential suppliers know more about their business than we do. We know our problems and our objectives and that is what RFPs need to concentrate on. Let the suppliers use their expertise and knowledge to propose the solutions. We can always negotiate changes in the proposed solution. If you are working on or anticipate developing a request for proposal, give us a call. We can make the process a lot less painful and you will get the results you want. And remember, results are more important than process. **S**

Jim Passier



State of Connecticut
Procurement Services
165 Capitol Avenue
Box 150414
Hartford, CT 06115-0414

Visit us online at:
www.state.ct.us/das/busopp.htm

**BULKRATE
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO.
4313
HARTFORD, CT**