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8 revealing questions and answers in the JEDI cloud contract solicitation



Criticism has amped up over the Department of Defense's insistence that a 10-year cloud computing gcontract, reportedly worth as much as \$10 billion, be structured as a single award rather than a program where multiple companies would compete for task orders.

NCPC



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The latest sign of a fissure between the federal IT industry and the Pentagon over a massive and controversial cloud computing effort landed this week in the form of a letter from the IT Alliance for Public Sector to Congress criticizing the single-award structure of the Joint Enterprise Defense Infrastructure (JEDI) contract.

In the letter, [first reported by Nextgov](#), ITAPS – which advocates for improved procurement policies and practices and represents more than 80 tech companies – urges lawmakers to do what's necessary to ensure "robust, transparent engagement" on the acquisition strategy.

"The current strategy dilutes the benefits of best practices, strongly increasing the likelihood of vendor and technology lock-in, and negatively impacting innovation, costs, and security," the letter states. "Moreover, it sends an ominous signal that competitors should not invest in the public sector marketplace."

It again amps up the criticism over the Department of Defense's insistence that the 10-year contract, reportedly worth as much as \$10 billion, [be structured as a single award](#) – with the perception being that the DOD favors Amazon Web Services for the work – rather than a program where multiple companies would compete for task orders. The ongoing rift, ahead of the official request for proposals expected to drop this month, inspired me to wade through [the 1,089 comments submitted by 46 vendors, two associations and three government agencies](#) to the statement of work and other materials.

Many are highly technical:

"Would the government please provide edge node cluster configuration performance requirements?"

But just as many are couched as technical queries that seem more designed to make a contentious point about the single award. There's an edge to some of the questions that's rather cutting. As are some of the government's responses – these DOD program managers could quickly silence a comedy-club heckler with material like this.

Here are eight exchanges, lightly edited for grammar, acronym translation and copy style, particularly indiscriminate use of capital letters. The thrust and parry underscores some consistent themes in both the questions and responses, the pain points and the business objectives – and might telegraph where things are headed with the official RFP.

Question: The goal in this section is to field fortified security solutions. How is it possible to field these solutions when the major commercial cloud providers use commodity-based hardware that offers no security of the compute and storage platforms at the BIOS and firmware levels? Will the government ask the cloud provider chosen to enhance these platforms to obtain this level of security?

Answer: The vendor's assertions are inconsistent with the information revealed during the government's market research activities.

Question: Data in motion both inside and outside of the cloud infrastructure could be vulnerable to both change and illegal reads. Will the government consider adding a new [contract line item number] for security services and products like cryptography for data in motion?

Answer: Your comment has been noted. The requirement remains the same.

Question: With the goal of the chosen vendor offering a commercial cloud, this section flows against that goal as the tactical edge of forward-deployed units does not interface with the commercial cloud due to security. Will the government please clarify if their only goal is to utilize commercial cloud providers Microsoft

or Amazon or if the goal is to utilize FedRAMP providers in the managed services provider role.

Answer: Offerors may propose any kind of teaming/partnering arrangement so long as the proposed solution meets the requirements of the solicitation.

Question: The goal of the RFI/RFP is to take advantage of developments in the commercial cloud and then transition these to the Department of Defense. This seems opposed to the driving force that everything will move to the commercial cloud where possible with no mention of using the developed tools, simply stating in the cloud. Can the government please identify the true intent of this RFI/RFP?

Answer: The overarching objectives of the RFP are stated in the draft [statement of objectives].

Question: A worldwide, highly available, resilient infrastructure – with a single point of failure represented by a single-award approach – is a contradiction in terms, please explain.

Answer: Your comment has been noted. The requirement remains as stated.

Question: The commercial cloud computing provider ecosystem has evolved where clouds have become purpose-built with widely varying workload optimization. For example, a few leading [cloud service providers, or CSPs] have emerged for office productivity workloads, while other CSPs have optimized for [enterprise resource planning] workloads and still others have optimized for machine learning and artificial intelligence workloads. Is it the DOD acquisition strategy to maintain JEDI as a single award IDIQ for the period of performance, including option years, or will DOD consider the option to add additional CSPs to JEDI over time?

Answer: JEDI Cloud will be a single-award IDIQ contract for the period of performance including option periods.

Question: A 2018 industry survey demonstrated that 81 percent of large enterprises adopted over three clouds and were experimenting with even more cloud service providers. How does the government intend to achieve commercial parity when its solution options will be dramatically limited to one [Infrastructure as a Service/Platform as a Service] provider because IaaS/PaaS providers are not compatible with every application?

Answer: The solicitation reflects the Department's requirements for this particular contract.

Question: The objective should be to enable multiple [cloud service providers, or CSPs] to operate within and for DOD. The timeline and objectives are very risky for any single CSP. From a cybersecurity point of view this is like putting all your eggs into one basket. The cloud is quite likely to be the initial target at the commencement of any cyber attack. Should a platform be infiltrated or a flaw discovered, a single provider reduces the attack surface to exactly one. There are also issues with a single CSP providing all the specified technology, for example, edge services or content routing. In addition, any marketplace would need to be fair for all software providers. Not all platforms support all types of software equally as well. To ensure the government has the most capability and flexibility for its missions it is strongly recommended that multiple cloud service providers be available to the government in order to achieve the desired capability.

Answer: Your comment has been noted.