

Government contractors beginning to take second looks at public sector opportunities



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Government contracting has always been attractive to companies of all types and sizes. Public sector contracts are large, they last many years and they have a tendency to be rolled over into new contracts. However, there are currently so many government contracting opportunities throughout the United States that successful firms are becoming more selective. This may be a good thing.

Some public entities are facing such immense budget problems that contractors are being forced to wait for payment. It is hard to argue with a purchasing department and almost impossible to sue a governmental entity. So, private sector firms have little leverage if they are mistreated once a contract is in place. That may not be as critical for a large firm as it is for a smaller one...but often it can be very troublesome for any firm, no matter the size.

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Electronic health records incentive payment forthcoming

Public comment sought on proposed regulations regarding change
Feedback is being sought by federal officials on proposed regulations aimed at encouraging physicians and hospitals to move from paper to electronic files. The switch to electronic health record (EHR) technology is geared to improving the quality of health care in the United States, improving health care efficiency and improving patient safety.

One of the proposed rules issued by the Centers for Medicare and Medicare Services seeks to define "meaningful use" of EHR technology. Meaningful use of EHR technology is required for health care providers and institutions to receive Medicare incentive payments. These incentives were put in place to encourage the use of health information technology more quickly by individual providers and organizations related to the health care system. The proposed rule also outlines the planned payment methodologies for the Medicare and Medicaid EHR incentive programs. The Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) regulations set standards and specifications aimed at enhancing the interoperability, functionality, utility and security of health information technology. Health care officials believe that EHR technology will allow providers to give better care while improving patient experience of care.

The proposed regulations also set standards that must be met by certified EHR technology for the exchange of health care information among providers and between providers and patients. Standard formats for clinical summaries and prescriptions are addressed, as well as standard terms for clinical problems, procedures, lab tests, medications and allergies and standards for the secure transfer of this information via the Internet. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services was required to adopt its initial set of standards by Dec. 31 of last year. There will be an opportunity for public comments and refinement that lasts 60 days, with the final rule issued later this year. Incentive payments to eligible hospitals could begin as early as October.

Incentive payments to other eligible providers will be delayed until around January 2011. To view the proposed rules and fact sheet, click [HERE](#).

Stimulus bill bonds becoming popular with cities

Memphis latest municipality to apply for development bonds

The City of Memphis, Tennessee, is the latest municipality to move toward the use of federal stimulus bill bonds for major projects it hopes will encourage investment and development in some inner-city neighborhoods. The Recovery Zone Economic Development Bonds allow cities to finance government projects where there are high concentrations of poverty, high unemployment rates and increasing home foreclosures. The funds can also be used in federal Empowerment Zones or Renewal Communities.

Memphis has been issued \$27.7 million in Economic Development Bonds that it plans to use to help finance 32 inner-city neighborhood projects. The federal government will rebate the bond issuer 45 percent of the interest costs. Another \$41.5 million in Recovery Zone Facility Bonds will be used to invest in private projects. The funds can be used to finance the purchase of business property within an already-designated Recovery Zone. The proposed projects are mostly in the center of the city and in North Memphis and South Memphis.

Federal dollars to assist Louisiana hurricane recovery process

Public assistance funds go to transit authority, Plaquemines Parish

More than \$10.8 million in public assistance funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA) is headed to the Regional Transit Authority (RTA) for Hurricane Katrina-related damages at two of its New Orleans facilities. Another \$10.4 million in additional federal aid was also announced for hurricane damages in the Plaquemines Parish for the Port Sulphur Civic Center, Boothville Community Center, Diamond Community Center and Davant Community Center.

Nearly \$9.2 million of the New Orleans funding was provided as a consolidated grant for the RTA's Desire Parkway facility. This funding combines more than 20 grants into one, enabling the RTA to more quickly access recovery funds and provide bus and street car service quicker for the citizens of New Orleans. The remainder of the funding is for repair work on the RTA's Randolph Building on Canal Street.

The \$10.4 million going to Plaquemines Parish matches the amount of damage to several facilities, but the parish has chosen to use the money to build four new consolidated community centers.

What the states are doing

Seeking a wind generator and solar panels to provide an alternative energy source for turning its town offices green, the city of Greenville, Maine, has applied for an \$80,000 federal energy efficiency block grant to help pay for the proposed project.

The Bay Model Visitor Center, an education center administered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Sausalito, California, will get a \$13.2 million facelift thanks to stimulus funds. Among the projects are a new roof with a solar system installed, new carpeting, finishing and updating exhibits, installing climate controls and repairing vessels.

Vermont libraries will benefit from a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to help provide libraries throughout the state with broadband Internet access. The funding will provide the state's match for federal funding from the Recover Act. Only 20 percent of the state's libraries meet the national standard for library connectivity.

The West Shore School District in Pennsylvania plans to use some of its education stimulus funding to purchase and implement a new software program to assist students who are having trouble with reading comprehension.

The city of Bozeman, Montana, plans to use approximately \$2.2 million in stimulus funds to build an administration and lab building at its sewage treatment plant (\$800,000) and to purchase a digester (\$500,000) at the plant.

In Manitowoc, Wisconsin, the local school district will use the more than \$2 million it will get from stimulus funds for books and computer hardware and software that will track special needs students' progress. About half of the funding will be used to supplement the general operating budget.

Stimulus funds will be used by the city of Lafayette, Ohio, to purchase software that will allow city workers to control approximately 70 traffic lights from a single location, thus slowing traffic congestion caused by storms, motor vehicle accidents and other traffic-related incidents. Some \$680,000 in stimulus funds will pay for installation of signal equipment, while a federal grant of \$252,000 will pay for the necessary computer hardware and software.

Repaving of approximately one mile of San Dimas Avenue is in store for the city of San Dimas, California, thanks to \$1.1 million in stimulus funds that will help offset the costs of the \$1.8 million project. The plan calls for replacing 21 inches of pavement. Also included is a makeover of existing landscape medians.

A Broward County, Florida, project totaling approximately \$100 million that will restripe I-95 and widen its shoulders is being planned by the Florida Department of Transportation. The project also will include the addition of one lane in each direction and widening of shoulders. The state will use \$88 million in stimulus funds toward completion of the project.

Bids are expected to go out in February for 14 local road projects in Quachita Parish, Louisiana. Three entities - Monroe, West Monroe and the parish Police Jury - will split \$9.6 million to be used for the road improvement projects.

More than \$3 million in stimulus fund grants will be used by 20 Nebraska school districts and education service units to improve technology in their elementary and secondary schools. Receiving the grants were: Crete; Educational Service Unit 6; Garden County; Plattsmouth; Auburn; Broken Bow; Educational Service Unit 10; Omaha; Lyons-Decatur; Heartland; Falls City; Lincoln; Kearney-Hastings Consortium; Minitare, Educational Service Unit 11; Educational Service Unit 5; Wausa, Cody Kilgore; Educational Service Unit 7; and Lexington.

Approximately \$1.7 million in stimulus funds is headed to the state of Minnesota, where it will be used to map high-speed Internet access to determine what areas are under-served.

A low-interest loan funded by the stimulus bill will help American Falls, Idaho, refurbish its drinking water system. The \$3.3 million loan will come from the low-interest drinking water construction loan program and carries an interest rate of just 0.5 percent, which could save the city millions of dollars in interest over the next 30 years.

Fairfax County, Virginia, will use \$6.5 million in stimulus funds to help build a water reclamation plant which will treat water to be used for cooling towers at a waste-to-energy facility. The county's portion of the cost of the project - \$15 million - will be paid with the money generated from the same of reclaimed water over 20 years.

A combination of stimulus funds and state funding program revenues will help build two housing developments near Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, where an increased need for housing is expected as a result of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) action. One unit will be an eight-unit apartment building and the other will include 45 income-restricted townhouse rentals.

The city of Pascagoula, Mississippi, plans to use some of the \$1 million it was allotted in stimulus funds to make road improvements on the Old Mobile Highway, including a bridge replacement and installation of sidewalks and crosswalks.

With \$7 million in stimulus funds headed its way, the city of Kingsport, Tennessee, plans to use \$2.2 million for water and sewer projects, \$2.16 million for street resurfacing, \$1.3 for transit projects including bus purchases, \$219,000 for energy saving projects and \$109,000 for housing projects.

The town of Shelby, Nebraska, will receive a loan of \$442,000 and a grant of \$354,000 from federal

stimulus funds administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The funds will be for water infrastructure improvements and upgrades to its water system.

Officials of the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California, are hopeful stimulus funds will be available to help them renovate the home of the "Granddaddy of them all" college football bowl game. The renovations carry a price tag of \$164 million with the largest part of the project the increasing of suite capacity from 600 to 2,500. Officials said the costs of rental of the suites would offset the bonds necessary for the project.

Other national news

Escambia County to seek \$178.5 million from Florida Legislature

When the Florida Legislature meets again, the Escambia County delegation will take its requests for \$178.5 million in funding requests to lawmakers. The list includes nearly two dozen items. Among them are \$93 million for Phase 1 of the I-10/Beulah Interchange and Beltway corridor, \$30 million for federal highway resurfacing, \$16 million for a drainage project at Beach Haven, for 31 miles of county right-of-way and 200 road intersections, \$6 million for a drainage project on Muscogee Road to alleviate flooding, \$6 million for repair and replacement of bridges, \$5.9 million for remediation of the Sautley Landfill and \$4.7 million for widening of Olive Road.

Military spending outpacing flailing economy in Florida

Military spending will again provide a solid base for the economy in Florida. At Hurlburt Field, a new Joint Operational Planning Facility is expected to be completed in November at a cost of \$7.3 million. Other projects include a Soundside Club and Visiting Quarters valued at \$6.7 million, a \$9 million 720th Special Tactics Group facility, a new vehicle maintenance facility and another \$13 million to renovate existing housing and recreation. Air Force and Navy operations hangars with price tags totaling more than \$58 million and a \$55.8 million training center are expected to open by 2011.

Grant will help pay for part of schools' solar roof projects

Thanks to a series of grants and loans from the Marin Community Foundation, California's Dixie School District will by this summer be providing 80 percent of its own energy with solar power. A student-led initiative led the school district to installing solar panels on school buildings that will in the long run reduce the district's energy costs to zero. The students - and the school board - had to get past the fact that the initial outlay would be approximately \$2.7 million. While the benefits are considerable, the initial investment and the time it takes for the entire project to be under way are costly. One method of finance was government assistance that allows a taxable entity, in this case the bond holder, to reap benefits in return for a zero interest rate. That meant costs in the first years would be low as would costs at the end of the project. It was the in-between years that almost scuttled the project. But the Marin Foundation's \$400,000 in grants and loans covered those in-between years, making the project revenue neutral. The installation of the solar panels is expected to begin in April and take four to six weeks to finish.

Bartow County projects included in Florida transportation plan

Bartow County, Florida, will see the construction of two new roads, trails, sidewalks and the addition of a fog and smoke alert system on I-4 from funding in the Florida Department of Transportation's five-year plan. Some of the projects include a \$9 million extension of CR 559, an increase to six lanes on a portion of U.S. 27 at a cost of \$25.5 million, the \$51 million construction of the first part of the Bartow Northern Connector, a \$1.7 million pedestrian bridge over Avenue T, a \$3.4 million system to alert motorists to fog and smoke along I-4 and construction of a \$1.3 million Upper Peace Legacy Trail on Lake Hancock. Sidewalk needs will also be addressed.

North Carolina agencies encouraged to use social media

There was a time when state workers were disciplined for using social media sites. Today in North Carolina, it is encouraged and the state is issuing new guidelines and tutorials to increase the use of sites like Facebook and Twitter. The goal of using these sites is to create a presence on social networking sites and to ensure its use complies with public records and archiving laws. Government officials are encouraging the use of these sites as a means of creating communication and interaction with citizens of the state.

Carole Wallace Post named New York City's IT commissioner

Carole Wallace Post, former director of agency services in the Mayor's Office of Operations, has been

named the new commissioner of the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications for New York City. She replaces former IT Commissioner Paul Cosgrave. She said she will continue to work to consolidate IT infrastructure, put more city services online, establish enterprise solutions for citywide functions and make interaction of government and citizens easier.

Post began her public service career in the New York City government in 2001 in the Department of Buildings. From there she moved to the Mayor's Office in 2006. She will begin in her new post on Jan. 19.

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Calendar of events

Final DOE webinar on Greensburg green community set Jan. 12

"Greensburg, Kansas: Lessons Learned and Steps Forward" is the title of a U.S. Department of Energy webinar planned for 12 to 1:30 p.m. (EST) on Tuesday, Jan. 12. This is the third and final webinar regarding Greensburg, Kansas, presented by the Building Technologies Program. Greensburg is rebuilding as a model green community after recovering from a massive tornado more than two years ago. The town is incorporating renewable energy and energy efficiency strategies to help become an affordable sustainable community. This webinar will discuss successes in rebuilding green in the residential sector and ongoing efforts to establish a green home program in Greensburg and the start of a new wind energy business and plans for the future. The webinar is geared toward federal agencies, state energy offices, renewable energy and energy efficiency associations, architects, planning firms and residential and commercial builders. This webinar is free of charge, but participants must [register in advance](#) to obtain a URL for the presentation and call-in phone number. For more information, click [HERE](#).

Small business briefing conferences slated in Texas

The last two sessions of the Texas Department of Transportation's (TxDOT) Business Outreach and Program (BOP) Services Small Business Briefing conferences have been announced for April 1, 2010, in Dallas and June 15, 2010, in Texarkana. The conference goal is to provide small and minority-owned business communities an opportunity to learn more about contracting opportunities with TxDOT. Information will be available to help them do business with the agency and the State of Texas. The sessions not only allow small businesses to be introduced to TxDOT and other state agencies, but also allows them to learn more about the economic development opportunities in their regions. It also allows the agencies to show the myriad of opportunities available for small and minority businesses in the state. For more information, click [HERE](#) or call 1.866.480.2518, Option 2.

DOE announces webinars relating to Recovery Act reporting

The U.S. Department of Energy is hosting webinars for grant, loan or other non-contractor recipients regarding reporting on the use of Recovery Act funding. To join one of these webinars, a recipient will need to take the following steps: Log onto www.JoinWebinar.com, type a webinar ID (see below for ID for each day/time) and type in his or her e-mail address. After hitting "Continue," participants will be required to enter their first and last names for the e-mail address provided in (3). After clicking the "Register Now" button, participants will receive an automatically generated e-mail identifying the Web site to log into to see the webinar, as well as phone number to call into should the registrant's computer lack speakers to hear the webinar. Recipients can register at anytime, including during the webinar.

The Schedule/Webinar ID for Grant, Loan, or other non-Contractor Recipients:

Session 12: Thursday, January 7, 1:00 pm EST. Webinar ID: 381404929

Session 13: Friday, January 8, 1:00 pm EST. Webinar ID: 423811153

The Schedule/Webinar ID for Contractors:

Session 11: Wednesday, January 6, 2:30 pm EST. Webinar ID: 545543984

Session 12: Thursday, January 7, 2:30 pm EST. Webinar ID: 365590672

TxDOT plans webinars for construction, professional services businesses

A new series of webinars targeting small, minority and women-owned businesses in construction and professional services in Texas will begin Feb. 3, 2010, through the Texas Department of Transportation's (TxDOT) Business Outreach and Program (BOP) Services branch. These webinars are an extension of the external online 2009 TxDOT seminars that cover topics ranging from how to become a pre-qualified bidder on TxDOT contracts to online access of bid lettings and contract plans and more. Each session provides information to contractors, suppliers and small businesses relating to how TxDOT operates with external parties, how to better understand these processes and procedures and how to improve opportunities and obtain contracts at TxDOT. The webinars are open to potential contractors, subcontractors, suppliers, DBEs and other small businesses. Each webinar is limited and registration slots are on a first-come, first-served basis. More information will be available after Jan. 15, 2010, at www.txdot.gov. Questions may be forwarded to TxDOT-BOP-Webinars@dot.state.tx.us or by calling 1-866-480-2518, Option 2. Applying for the webinars does not guarantee a spot to participate.

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All 50 states have own recovery Web sites

All 50 of the states and the District of Columbia now have their own "recovery" sites where citizens can track where ARRA dollars are being spent in their respective states. The states are charged with ensuring accountability and transparency in how the funds are spent and their Web sites show the projects being funded and the amount of ARRA funds allocated. For links to each of the state and District of Columbia recovery Web sites, [HERE](#).

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