

Request: Public Safety Funding—Radio Communications Funding

Description: Merced County’s Public Safety Radio System infrastructure was established in the 1980s to provide first responders and support personnel with a reliable radio system that supports a countywide operational area that is 60 miles long and 32 miles wide. The system provides support for the Merced County Sheriff’s Office, District Attorney’s Office, Probation Department, City of Atwater Police Department as well as interoperability communications with the University of California Merced Police Department and other jurisdictions in neighboring counties.

Many of the components of the existing infrastructure are no longer supported by the manufacturer and need to be replaced. The county finds itself in the position of searching for used parts to keep the system operational. In addition to the age of the equipment, geography and changes in population have stretched the effectiveness of the system. The existing system is supported by a single location on a site in a neighboring county. A single-site system is not capable of providing coverage in many key areas of the county. This places first responders and the public they serve at great physical risk. In life and death situations, personnel have been forced to leave buildings and use cellphones to communicate with 911 dispatch centers. It further impacts operations because personnel are not able to communicate with each other in the field from their cell phones.

A new, modernized system would vastly improve public safety response efforts and officer safety, as well as the safety of the public.

Necessity: Merced County began working with its vendor (Motorola) in 2020 on a system design that provides for modern technology that improves the reliability of the system while also addressing the serious coverage issues that we experience on a daily basis. The proposed system replaces the single-site system with an 11-site system that retains the current site and adds 10 additional sites on the valley floor.

The project is composed of two phases. The first phase, site acquisition, must be completed before a final system design document is approved. Phase I includes the cost for additional infrastructure to support a public safety grade radio system. Infrastructure costs include modifications to towers, backup power generators, electrical and data connectivity. The site acquisition phase will take 4–6 months. The second phase of the project consists of the purchase, configuration, and installation of the radio system. Phase II is estimated to be completed in 27 months.

The county’s current fleet of radios are not compatible with the new system and must be replaced before the new system is installed.

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In preparation for the new system, the county has programmed the following funding toward the project:

\$255,659.25 (FY 21/22)

\$206,000.00 (FY 22/23)

\$461,659.25 (Total programmed funding for the project to date.)

Note: Additional funding will be programmed at the local level to support the project for the purchase of infrastructure, radios, software and services as the project moves forward.

Merced County is respectfully requesting funding to complete Phase I and Phase II of the project to install a modern public safety radio system that will serve the needs of the Merced County operational area for decades to come (see requested federal contribution below). The County is also engaged with its representatives in the state legislature to assist with funding for the project.

Estimated cost to complete the project:

\$2.5 million (Phase I – Site Acquisition/Site preparation and development)

\$18.5 million (Phase II – System Acquisition, Configuration, Installation)

\$21 million (Total Cost to complete the project)

Merced County is seeking the following federal contribution:

\$2.5 million (Phase I Site acquisition/Site preparation)

\$4.1 million (Phase II First 25% payment upon execution of the phase II contract to purchase the system.)

\$6.6 million (Total federal contribution)