

Agenda Item Report



Winnebago County
The Wave of the Future

DATE: 10/13/2023
FROM: Winnebago County Executive's Office
RE: Winnebago County Fire Chiefs Association (WCFCA) – Replace mobile, portable and DVRS radios in the county in the amount of \$3.2M.

General Description:

Proposal for Winnebago County Fire Chiefs Association Request for Radio Equipment to American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Strategy and Outcomes Commission

Action Requested:

Direction to draft a resolution releasing a single grant issued to the Winnebago County Fire Chiefs Association to disburse among local governments requesting radio and communications components.

Procedural Steps:

Committee of Jurisdiction: ARPA Strategy & Outcomes Commission Meeting date: 10/20/2023

Background:

Shortly after the creation of the ARPA Strategy and Outcomes Commission, the county's fire chiefs approached the commission regarding the purchase of new radios (subscriber units).

Winnebago County, through the Sheriff's Office, operates and maintains the county's only public safety answering point (PSAP) or dispatch center. The county through grants, tax levy, and borrowing, provides this service at no cost to other local governments. Dispatcher labor and training costs, equipment, maintenance, and other contracts are entirely the responsibility of the county. This shared service model saves local governments considerably – especially as the dispatch center upgrades to Next Generation 911 (NG911).

Over a decade ago, the county upgraded our system. At that time, the county purchased all radios needed for use by the county and local governments. The agreement at that time was the local governments would create a plan to replace radios for police and fire at the cost of the local government. Unfortunately, planned obsolescence of these radios is seven to ten years.

There is no doubt replacement of radios is expensive. For their part, the Fire Chiefs Association surveyed the fifteen Fire Districts across the county regarding needs for replacement radios and radio components. That survey results in requests from fourteen departments for a total of 436 portable radios and components, 82 mobile radios and components, and 2 DVRS radio repeaters and components.

Motorola, the manufacturer of the current radios, provided a quote for purchase of these items totaled \$3,265,899.60. Nielson Communications, a local Kenwood retailer, provided quote of \$2,031,578.20 for similar radio equipment.

At the previous meeting, the commission raised questions around the specific radios in the quote, the difference in price per unit when specific components were included, and what would be the most equitable way to accommodate the request. The Commission then asked Fox Crossing Chief Todd

Sweeney, the president of the chief's association, to work with Fire Chiefs to clarify the requests, gain additional information, and identify priorities.

Upon receiving further input from Chiefs, Chief Sweeney heard a desire to maintain legacy radio systems, as they train on specific equipment, and for the commission to grant a set amount of funds to the Fire Chiefs Association to then be distributed among fire districts to cover a portion of each radio and radio component request. This allows each fire district to acquire the equipment they are most comfortable with and otherwise would not be able to bring up to date, after years of postponing replacement or ordering piecemeal only once existing radios and components are long past their recommended end-of-life date.

A grant from the ARPA Strategy and Outcomes Commission would allow departments to order together and maintain an economy of scale for whichever equipment fits in their existing training and systems.

The commission also asked for what other counties utilized ARPA or other funds to fund radios for local governments. We heard back from two counties: Jefferson provided no funding. Washington provided \$500,000. Neither of these counties are on a Motorola system.

Policy Discussion:

The commission has several discussion points regarding a potential grant for radios and to provide enough direction to staff to draft a resolution:

- 1) Some local governments have already purchased radios. Are those governments eligible to receive reimbursement funds?
- 2) The chief's association is comfortable working with all fire districts on implementing a grant, which would ensure collaboration and fairness in the process.
- 3) Are police agencies who have not purchased eligible for funds?
- 4) What amount of a grant would the commission request be allocated for the purchase of local government radios. Based on purchasing Motorola, the following amounts represent a percentage of the purchase: \$800,000 grant = 24.5% \$1,000,000 = 30.6%
\$1,632,949.80 = 50% \$2,031,578.20 (amount of the Nielsen quote) = 62.2%

Attachments:

Radio Quotes

Local Government Funding Document