

Bidding successfully for new fire funding

The Government has declared that its new £81m investment in fire and rescue is designed to 'improve [the] resilience, efficiency and technology in their control services'. Bids for the new money must be received by 4 November this year. Intergraph public safety consultant Nick Chorley provides some tips on how to bid for your share of the funding.



The potential exists to maximise the investment your fire and rescue authority receives, up to £1.8m per authority, by submitting a technology-enabled bid that increases operational resilience and efficiency, in line with Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) priorities, and saves money. Note also that, 'Authorities may submit plans for more than £1.8m if exceptional resilience benefits would result'.

Eighty-four percent of those responding to DCLG's recent consultation said that greater fire and rescue service collaboration was the way forward [see 'background' below]. This would require bidders to show how they plan to collaborate with other fire and rescue services, and how they would derive benefits from doing so. Multiple services, whether or not they are neighbours, can maximise their financial award by bidding together. Given the Government's declared commitment to localism, and its published objectives of greater efficiency and resiliency, collaborative bids should be well received.

Highly practical bids that use technology creatively to boost fire control efficiency and resilience will have the best chance of maximising the government funding they receive.

The creative use of technology is key to realising the benefits proposed in any successful bid. Combining collaboration with a focus on control room efficiency will deliver the greatest measurable savings through the redeployment of staff.



Get the mobilising technology right

For collaboration to deliver maximum efficiency it is vital to have a mobilising system that is both scalable and flexible: one that has been designed from the bottom up to accommodate multiple services while preserving the individual identity of each fire and rescue service (FRS). A single system of this kind can be used to support a number of FRSs in a one-stop, highly resilient, virtual mobilising environment where multiple control rooms balance workloads across borders, sharing responsibility for service continuity and backup. This model has already been successfully used by a number of the regional ambulance services, set up in 2006. The extension of any bid to encompass other, shared control room services (not simply those for FRS) will also increase its funding attraction for government.

Is the scenario above a good bid strategy? Yes, when you bear in mind FiReControl's original objective – still critical for government – to replace 46 stand-alone fire and rescue control rooms with 'a national network of nine resilient control centres', responding to the twin threats of terrorism and natural disasters.

Add to this the fact that at least 25 percent of existing fire mobilising, control room systems now need to be replaced as their technology becomes obsolete, and the opportunity for fire and rescue authorities to share mobilising services is clear.

Highly practical bids that use technology creatively to boost fire control efficiency and resilience will have the best chance of maximising the government funding they receive.

Reader Reply No.97



Author: Nick Chorley is a consultant with public safety technology company Intergraph. He can answer questions on this article at nick.chorley@intergraph.com

£81m new funding – background

Following the termination of FiReControl, DCLG consulted on the future of fire and rescue control services in England. Sixty-one submissions were received including 41 from fire and rescue authorities and services. Ninety-eight percent of those who expressed a view stressed the importance of improved resilience, enhanced technology and increased efficiency, while 84 percent agreed that increased collaboration, determined locally with government support was the best way forward. Two thirds of those favouring a collaborative approach said it should be combined with national technical standards, operating controls and procedures. Common interoperability standards were also called for by those consulted, to enable more resilient fallback and work overload arrangements*.

What next?

DCLG's new funding of £81m – up to £1.8m for each fire and rescue authority in England – will 'support enhancements to fire and rescue control and mobilisation arrangements in a way that delivers improvements to resilience, security and efficiency...through enhanced local rather than national solutions'. A separate £1.8m (total) may be used to fund related steps such as the development of common technical and procedural standards. Authorities are being invited to send a summary of their plans, 'which will be reviewed by the Department to ensure that the funding they are providing offers value for taxpayers' money, and resilience benefits'.

"This £81m should go a long way to ensuring authorities can build resilience by putting together alternative [fire system] upgrades, and it's cash which will stretch even further where they combine efforts to find savings," says Brian Coleman, Chairman of the Local Government Association's Fire Services Management Committee.

* Source: *Future of Fire and Rescue Control services in England consultation – summary of responses. Department for Communities and Local Government, July 2011*