

Fact Sheet: Commerce Department and Department of Homeland Security Sign Memorandum of Understanding to implement the \$1 billion Public Safety Interoperable Communications Grant Program

The U.S. Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Friday, February 16, 2007, to implement the \$1 billion Public Safety Interoperable Communications (PSIC) Grant Program to help state, local and federal first responders better communicate during a natural or man-made disaster.

The Digital Television Transition and Public Safety Act of 2005 (the Act) provides that the Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information of the Department of Commerce, in consultation with the Secretary of the DHS, shall make payments not to exceed \$1 billion in the aggregate through fiscal year 2010 to carry out the PSIC program. The Act also directed NTIA, in consultation with DHS, to develop the grant program policies, procedures and regulations of the grants to be awarded in 2007, and grant projects will be completed in Fiscal Year 2010. As required in the recently enacted Call Home Act of 2006, the grants will be awarded by September 30, 2007.

The grant program, which covers public safety agencies in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and four U.S. territories, will assist public safety agencies in the acquisition of, deployment of, or training for the use of interoperable communications systems that can utilize reallocated public safety spectrum in the 700 MHz band for radio communication.

Under this MOU, DHS's Office of Grants and Training will provide grants management services to NTIA for the PSIC grant program. DHS, among other things, will: (1) develop policies, procedures and regulations to govern the PSIC program; (2) develop a timetable to complete actions so that grants may be awarded by the established dates; (3) develop and distribute program application and guidance materials; (4) publicize the availability of grant opportunities; (5) provide technical assistance to applicants; (6) notify recipients of grant awards; (7) award grant funds by September 30, 2007; and (8) conduct site visits to verify progress and completion of funded projects.

NTIA, among other things, will: (1) assist in the development of policies, procedures, and regulations governing the PSIC program and approve the same; (2) provide DHS with NTIA access rights to Grants.gov to post funding opportunity announcements and post NTIA grant award information to the Federal Assistance Award Data Systems; (3) participate in publicizing the availability of grant opportunities under the PSIC Grant Program; (4) approve final grant awards; (5) review and approve an annual administrative plan to implement the program; (6) jointly announce grant awards; and (7) provide funding to DHS for administrative costs and the grant awards.

The PSIC Grant Program will be designed to complement funds that have been awarded through other grant programs-such as the Homeland Security Grant Program, and Infrastructure Protection Program-that included interoperable communications funds. The program guidance and application process will emphasize leveraging grants, contracts or state/local budgets to build and sustain intra- and interstate regional capabilities and identified needs. The program also will reflect existing guidance from the SAFECOM Program Office within the DHS Office for Interoperability and Compatibility.

The Program Plan sets forth the schedule of major activities regarding administration of the PSIC Grant Program and the budget plan delineates the amount of funds to be transferred between FY 2007 and FY 2011 for specific activities. Grants will be awarded after grant guidance is completed in the third quarter of FY 2007 and grant application information, and eligibility requirements also will be released, at this time.

NTIA will transfer an amount not to exceed \$988,985,000 to DHS over the full term of this agreement, including \$958,985,000 in grants and not more than \$30,000,000 for management and administrative services.

Public Safety Interoperable Communications Grant Program: Frequently-Asked Questions

Q1. What is the purpose of the Public Safety Interoperable Communications (PSIC) Grant Program?

A1. The PSIC Grant Program will provide funding to States and Territories starting in Fiscal Year 2007 to enable and enhance public safety agencies' interoperable communications capabilities. The PSIC Grant Program is a one-time grant opportunity to enhance interoperable capabilities with respect to voice, data, and/or video and encourage the use of innovative cost- and spectrum-efficient technology solutions.

Q2. What is the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)?

A2. NTIA, an agency within the Department of Commerce, is responsible for the development of domestic and international telecommunications and information policy for the Executive Branch, for ensuring the efficient and effective use of the federal radio spectrum, and for performing state-of-the-art telecommunications research, engineering, and planning.

Q3. Why is the PSIC Grant Program managed by NTIA?

A3. The Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (P.L. No. 109-171) established a firm deadline to complete the transition of broadcasters from analog to digital transmissions. This digital television transition returns analog television spectrum, of which 24 megahertz has been reallocated for public safety use. The remaining portion of the returned spectrum will be auctioned for commercial use. With the anticipated auction proceeds, NTIA was given authority to expend \$1 billion in grants to public safety agencies to improve interoperable communications.

Q4. What is the role of Department of Homeland Security?

A4. On February 16, 2007, NTIA and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Office of Grants and Training (G&T) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) through which NTIA will acquire grants-related administrative services and expertise from DHS. NTIA retains the approval authority on the program guidance, all grant awards, and grant applications.

Q5. How do the PSIC grants relate to the forthcoming public safety spectrum in the 700 MHz frequency band?

A5. The PSIC Grant Program will assist public safety agencies in the acquisition of, deployment of, or training for the use of interoperable communications systems that utilize -- or enable interoperability with communications systems that utilize -- reallocated public safety spectrum in the 764-776 MHz and 794-806 MHz bands. The PSIC Grant Program will assist public safety agencies in exploring and encouraging the use of all available technologies to advance overall public safety interoperability, so long as those frequencies will enable first responders to interoperate with the 700 MHz bands in the future.

Q6. How does the PSIC Grant Program relate to the DHS requirement to submit Statewide Plans?

A6. DHS has developed a comprehensive statewide planning approach, which each State will be required to implement this year. Statewide Plans will be used as part of the grant application process to ensure that investment justifications and applications are in line with broader, regional interoperability goals. Additionally, disbursement of the State's allocated funding will be contingent

upon submission of the Statewide Plan as required by DHS. A qualitative peer evaluation will be used for review of both the Statewide Plans and grant applications to ensure consistency.

Up to five percent of the total available funds will be disbursed at award to grantees in FY 2007 to ensure that Statewide Plans include consideration of PSIC grant requirements.

Q7. When are the Statewide Plans due to the DHS? Will the States receive help developing the plans?

A7. SAFECOM released the Statewide Communications Interoperability Plan development guidance for the March 21–23, 2007 symposium in Los Angeles, CA. The criteria set forth will serve as a basis for an eventual peer review process to approve the Statewide Plans. The criteria emphasize a regional approach to interoperability, including but not limited to—

- Governance
- Technology
- Standard Operating Procedures
- Training and Exercises
- Inclusion and coordination of existing plans and strategies (e.g., Tactical Interoperable Communication Plans or TICPs, Statewide Homeland Security Strategies)

DHS will deploy technical assistance to help States draft their Statewide Plans, and preliminary plans will be due to DHS by September 30, 2007. Final plans must be submitted by November 1, 2007 in order to ensure that peer reviews and the release of PSIC grant funding are expedited.

Q8. How will existing Tactical Interoperable Communication Plans (TICPs) be leveraged within the PSIC Grant Program?

A8. The PSIC Grant Program builds upon the planning efforts underway across State and local jurisdictions. Urban and metropolitan areas with existing TICPs received recommendations (from the AARs, IPs, and Tactical Interoperable Communications Scorecards) on how to improve regional interoperability. These plans, the recommendations, and the needs identified by the TICP participants should serve as the basis for developing Statewide Plans and investment justifications for PSIC grants.

Q9. What are the key dates associated with the PSIC Grant Program?

A9. The dates below represent key milestones associated with the PSIC Grant Program:

- February 16, 2007—Memorandum of Understanding signed between DHS and NTIA.
- March 21–23, 2007—Statewide Planning Workshop held in Los Angeles, CA.
- Mid-July 2007—NTIA and DHS jointly announce funding allocated for awards to States and Territories and release grant application materials.
- September 30, 2007—States and Territories submit preliminary Statewide Plans.
- November 1, 2007—States and Territories submit finalized Statewide Plans.

Q10. What if I have additional questions?

A10. For more information on the PSIC Grant Program, please contact the Centralized Scheduling and Information Desk (CSID) at 1-800-368-6498 or askcsid@dhs.gov. PSIC Grant Program updates will be posted on the NTIA website: <http://www.ntia.doc.gov/psic>