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by Thom Barker

RCMP automates fingerprint ID

IF THE NEW RCMP automated fingerprint identification system (AFIS) runs as smoothly as its procurement process, the Mounties will soon not only be getting their man, they may be doing it in record time.

The AFIS, part of a larger real time identification (RTID) project, represents a \$10 million investment to replace outdated paper processes and legacy systems and improve the efficiency of Canada's national fingerprint and criminal record repository.

"The AFIS contract award is a significant step in the RCMP efforts to modernize these essential systems," said RCMP Deputy Commissioner Peter Martin, the project's sponsor.

The RTID was initiated in April 2004 with an intensive requirements analysis, which culminated in the release of an RFP in January 2005. On the strength of the requirements analysis and RFP document, the project was able to meet all major milestones leading up to the October 13, 2005 announcement that Cogent Systems of South Pasadena, California had secured the contract on the basis of having met all the mandatory requirements and having the lowest adjusted bid evaluation value.

The RCMP was not able to supply information on the other bidders or bids, but spokesperson Sgt. Martin Blais said Cogent's was not necessarily the lowest. "Cogent Systems offered the best-valued proposal based on technical and financial merit, including AFIS performance testing results in response to a comprehensive competitive solicitation," he said.

This is consistent with the new federal "smart-buying" policy.

Cogent Systems certainly has the credentials for the job having worked with Scotland Yard and Interpol among other high profile clients including major banks and corporations.

"The strength of Cogent's fast, accurate and reliable AFIS technology during the testing process was a key factor in winning the contract award," said Cogent President and CEO Ming Hsieh. "Another factor is our ability to provide full electronic interoperability with existing AFIS systems throughout Canada with the new Cogent AFIS."

Cogent also brings to the table IBM Canada as its partner to provide platform development and integration services over the next four years.



The implementation will be conducted in two phases, said Blais. In Phase 1, scheduled for delivery in the late fall of this year, Cogent and IBM will install a new National Police Services-National Institute for Standards and Technology (NPS-NIST) server to support the AFIS and electronic submissions from private sector, government and other law enforcement agencies.

The top priority for the project is clearing the logjam of fingerprint-based criminal record searches for non-criminal purposes. The RCMP's Civil Fingerprint Screening Services (CFSS) reports the current processing time for these requests is "in excess of 150 days."

"Law enforcement and civil agencies rely on the accuracy and timeliness of these systems to support the safety and security of Canadians," said Martin.

The number of requests for criminal, civil, immigration and international purposes has increased dramatically over the past several years in response to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States.

If the implementation goes according to plan, CFSS will be able to receive electronic submissions by the end of the year when the NPS-NIST server running the new AFIS goes online. Blais said at that point, CFSS will be able to respond to 85 percent of civil clearance requests (those that do not hit a criminal file) within 72 hours.

The improved efficiency has far-reaching implications, including economic ones.

Rob Shirra, president of the Institute of Certified Management Consultants of British Columbia said many of his members require criminal background checks to secure government contracts. He welcomes the reduced waiting times. "That would be a tremendous benefit to consultants," he said.

It would be a benefit to governments as well. Currently, depending on project timelines, potential contractors who do not already have a security clearance are often not considered because of the prohibitive waiting period, Shirra said.

Further efficiencies will be gained during Phase 2. "Phase 2 project work will focus on re-engineering all relevant fingerprint identification and criminal records processes to streamline and improve service delivery," said Blais.

This will perhaps be most relevant in remote rural communities. Staff Sgt. Rod Holland is the commanding officer of a nine-member detachment in Smithers, BC. The

detachment's current manual processes require them to submit fingerprint identification requests through a forensics unit 200 kilometres away in Terrace. Holland said, depending on the priority of the investigation, it can take between two weeks and three months for processing.

"These processes do affect the flow of an investigation," he said. "[The new systems] will have advantages for the community, victims and everybody."

When Phase 2 of the RTID is completed in the fall of 2008, Blais said detachments like Holland's can expect a two-hour turnaround on 10-print searches and 24 hours on latent crime scene requests. *///*

Editor's note: Further information on how to contract for an AFIS system can be found at www.interpol.int/Public/Forensic/fingerprints/WorkingParties/IAEG/.

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