



**To: Bay Area UASI Approval Authority**  
**From: Barry Fraser, Interim General Manger, BayRICS Authority**  
**Date: December 13, 2012**  
**Re: Item #12: Interoperable Voice Communications Projects**

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**Recommendations:**

That the Approval Authority consider revisions to the 2013 Grant Allocation process that would (1) allocate funding “off the top” for regional voice communications projects; and (2) request that the Bay Area Regional Interoperable Communications Systems Authority (BayRICS) review the proposed funding priorities for regional voice communications projects developed by the Approval Authority’s Interoperability Work Group and make a final recommendation to the Approval Authority for allocating regional interoperable voice communications funding.

**Discussion/Description:**

**The UASI has Identified Regional Interoperable Communications as a Major Area for Capabilities Improvement, but the Focus and Funding for These Projects has Declined Significantly in Recent Years**

According to the UASI’s 2012 Grant Effectiveness Report, interoperable communications efforts are a key area for capability improvement. In 2008, the Approval Authority developed a five-year strategic plan to achieve region-wide interoperable communications among emergency responders in the Bay Area. The Bay Area has created four sub-regional entities to deploy Project 25 (P25) voice communications upgrades within their sub-regions, which would, when complete, achieve the vision of a regional interoperable voice network.

However, in recent years the regional plan has stalled and interoperable communications funding has declined. According to an Approval Authority report presented in August 2011, UASI has awarded over \$43 M for interoperability since 2006, but funding for these regional projects has declined significantly in recent years. For UASI 2012, Interoperable Communications

allocations amounted to only \$2.255 million. Meanwhile, a funding gap of over \$125 million remains to complete the four regional projects and achieve full interoperability in the region.

One reason for this decline in funding can be attributed to the emphasis on allocation decisions based on the hub process, with less emphasis on regional vision and planning. The hub process works very well for allocating funding for projects required for a single agency or small group of agencies. However, interoperable communications projects, by their nature, require regional strategy, regional coordination and a regional funding plan in order to maximize their value to the entire region.

### **The BayRICS Authority Is Well-Positioned To Coordinate Regional Project Funding**

The BayRICS Authority was created precisely to further this regional emphasis on interoperable communications. BayRICS's purpose, as stated in its Joint Powers Authority Agreement, is to "develop and establish . . . advanced information systems for interoperable public safety communications" (specifically including BayWEB and BayLoop) and to "cooperatively address the challenges of sustaining and managing shared interoperability assets and projects specific to voice and data communications." BayRICS is specifically charged with identifying funding mechanisms and system funding plans for these systems.

The Board is comprised of 13 Bay Area public safety leaders with vision and political savvy to drive regional coordination. BayRICS staff and Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) members have extensive technical and operational expertise in interoperable communications. Staff has experience developing system funding plans and could quickly develop a plan to assess gaps, allocate available resources and propose innovative funding solutions

BayRICS has already begun to take on regional voice communications initiatives, in recent months assuming a leadership role in regional projects such as BayLoop, FleetMap P25 channel mapping and regional concerns about T-Band Spectrum givebacks. At its November meeting, BayRICS Directors directed staff to begin research on a regional pooling plan for bulk purchases of P25 mobile and hand-held voice devices. BayRICS can also ensure an open, transparent decision-making process, as both the BayRICS Board and TAC comply with Brown Act open meetings rules.

Two of the four sub-regional P25 communications systems entities have expressed strong support for BayRICS as regional coordinator for voice communications planning. In addition, BayRICS staff has discussed this proposal with members of the UASI Management Team, who concurred with this approach.

### **The Approval Authority Should Consider Adopting a Regional Approach to Interoperable Communications Funding**

Staff proposes that the Approval Authority consider revisions to the UASI 2013 grant allocation process to allow funding for regional interoperable voice communications to be taken “off the top” and allocated on a regional basis to further the regional needs of the Bay Area. In addition, the Approval Authority should consider taking advantage of the BayRICS Authority’s expertise and regional leadership, by requesting that BayRICS review and validate regional funding priorities developed by the UASI Interoperability Work Group and make a final recommendation to the Approval Authority for allocating regional interoperable voice communications funding.

For UASI 2013, BayRICS staff recommends that the role of the BayRICS Authority should be limited to reviewing the proposed funding priorities developed by the Interoperable Working Group, and providing a final recommendation for regional funding to the Approval Authority. This change would eliminate the need for hub review of these regional projects, and would preserve the regional approach to funding these projects. BayRICS would provide a formal recommendation to the Approval Authority for regional communications funding no later than February 14, 2013.

For future years, the Approval Authority should consider working with BayRICS to update and revise the Bay Area’s strategic plan for interoperable communications and develop a clear path forward for allocating funding for these critical projects. This revised strategic plan should focus on the most efficient use of limited UASI funding and development of other funding alternatives to fill in the gaps, to allow the Bay Area to optimize the region’s interoperable communications capabilities in the near future.