

County Utilizes Online Bidding

Technology facilitates construction management of over one hundred special districts.

By Greg Bacon

The County of San Bernardino (CA), Special Districts Department administers over 133 Board of Supervisor's governed special districts throughout San Bernardino County. A special district is formed by constituents in unincorporated areas through a ballot measure that creates various municipal type services or enhanced services in those community areas that do not have such services. The additional services are paid for by service fees (agreed to in advance by the constituents) and paid for through their property tax bills annually. In some cases where large capital funding is required for the improvements requested, permanent divisions are created for financing purposes and the low interest loans are then repaid through the fees collected. Some of the services that a district provides may include one, some, or all of the following:

- Roads—maintenance, snowplowing, and/or construction.
- Parks and Recreation—parks, community centers, senior centers, senior nutrition programs, children's programs.
- Water—source, storage, and distribution. Current operations maintain over 12 water districts with 75 wells, 125 storage facilities, and hundreds of miles of pipelines.
- Sewer—collection, treatment, and disposal. Current operations maintain five primary and secondary treatment plants, nine sewer collection districts, and one vacuum system collection district.
- Street Lighting—all county unincorporated roads are maintained by the street lighting district where street

lights are desired and installed.

- Landscape District—mainly near new neighborhoods and state highways for the purpose of median and sound wall landscape maintenance.
- Television Translator District—provides satellite and cable television.
- Cemetery District—maintains and provides a burial place for local residents who do not have other arrangements.
- Fire—new fire stations.

To maintain and operate these districts, county service areas, and/or improvement zones (scattered over 21,000 square miles of mainly desert areas), the Special Districts Department contains and administers the following divisions: Operations (including water and sanitation), over 100 employees; Budget & Fiscal Services, 15 employees; Administration, 10 employees; Development, Engineering & Construction Services, seven employees; Human Resources, nine employees; and the MIS Division, seven employees.

Managing the bidding process for these extensive and far-reaching services can be quite a challenge. To facilitate the process, the Special Districts Department uses BB-Bid (The Blue Book of Building & Construction, www.thebluebook.com) mainly for capital improvement construction projects advertisement of public bids on projects that require formal bid advertising. I have also posted RFP's for professional services to solicit architects and engineering firms for various projects. The department prepared bid documents and posted the advertisement notice as well as instruction to bidders and the bid sheets on-line for contractors to use.

Future plans include utilizing digitized project drawings and posting them on-line for contractor's viewing. In all cases, the bid documents were still required to be purchased through the department for record keeping and logging purposes. For examples of some of the projects on which we used the BB-Bid service, please see Table 1.

Report Feature

We utilized BB-Bid's report feature to justify the amount of vendors who were interested in bidding the project versus those who were solicited. We also utilized the same feature to acknowledge that the minimum number of contractors were solicited and if any bid requirements were necessary, such as MBE/WBE, that those contractors received solicitations to maintain "good faith" in project solicitation efforts. We utilized this service in addition to local plan rooms such as the FW Dodge Plan Room (fwdodge.construction.com), BidAmerica (www.bidamerica.com), and REED Construction Data (www.reedconstructiondata.com). Since all plan rooms and the BB-Bid service are free to government, we did not have to announce projects in traditional print media like newspapers, saving the project advertising costs. Posting on the on-line plan rooms and sending sets to them satisfied public bidding requirements in lieu of newspaper advertising.

My experience with BB-Bid has been top-notch. Their on-line services are relatively intuitive and easy to use. Reports that can be generated from the bid process satisfy all levels of management and politicians, especially if a politician needs to know how many contractors from their district responded to a partic-

Table I. Sample Projects


Project	Scope	Status
County Service Area 20 (CSA 20) Joshua Tree	Water spray play park	Low bid \$219,806, contract awarded, in construction and 15 percent complete
CSA 20 Joshua Tree	Skate park	Low bid \$286,000, contract awarded, project completed June 29, 2006
County Fire Baker, CA	New fire station #53	Low bid \$3,097,000, contract awarded, project nearing completion, punch list issued
CSA 70, Improvement Zone G Permanent Road Division 70G1	Road paving of existing dirt residential roads utilizing recycled asphalt product, 1.5 miles of roads, and concrete crossing drainage improvements	Low bid \$744,921, contract awarded, project 50 percent complete
Kessler Park Equestrian Center Improvements Bloomington, CA	N/A	Low bid \$624,000, bids rejected and in progress with value engineering, no new re-bid date scheduled
CSA 70 Improvement Zone R-19, Copper Mountain Mesa, Winters Road Soil Stabilization Project	Stabilize existing dirt secondary road with asphalt grindings for residential access	Low bid \$175,000, contract awarded, project completed September 29, 2006
CSA 9 Phelan, CA	Community park improvements and new restroom	Low bid \$420,000, contract awarded, project completed April 20, 2006
Lytle Creek North Pre-Treatment Facility	N/A	Low bid \$1,200,000, contract awarded, in construction and 75 percent complete
CSA 64 Spring Valley Lake, CA	3-MG water storage reservoir	Engineer estimate of \$2,500,000, in design and preparing for bids
CSA 70 Improvement Zone J Oak Hills, CA	New 1,800 gpm water well	Low bid \$1,100,000, contract awarded, project completed August 18, 2006
CSA 70 Improvement Zone J, Oak Hills, CA	1-MG water storage reservoir	Low bid \$1,022,000, contract awarded, project completed September 19, 2006
County Fire, Household Hazardous Waste Reception Facility San Bernardino, CA	Site electrical upgrades	Low bid \$89,400, contract awarded, construction in progress and 60 percent complete
CSA 70 TV 3 & 4 29 Palms, CA	Power pole and line replacement	Low bid \$189,000, contract awarded, construction in progress and 45 percent complete
CSA 70 Improvement Zone R-42 Barstow, CA	1.7 miles of grading and paving of residential dirt roads	Low bid \$255,490, contract awarded, project completed September 30, 2005

ular bid that was posted on-line. That report can be easily obtained and printed from BB-Bid. I continue to utilize their service and have recently posted new projects for bid solicitation. I will also be using the service soon for multiple prime bidding on some office remodeling where cost savings will be paramount. By bidding multiple prime, it will keep general contractor overhead and profits down, which will save the county 10 to 15 percent in costs and give tax payers more “bang for the buck.” BB-Bid allows multiple vendor classification solicitation under one project either by formal bids or Request for Quotations, and it has the capability

for direct messaging to individual contractors for RFI clarification or other bidding questions. BB-Bid’s support specialists have also been responsive to any questions I may have and they always follow up to make sure that my bid posting went well on every project.

I initially utilized their service exclusively in the department. Now, however, all three project managers in the department utilize this service. A technician handles all postings and checks the messaging daily when projects are being bid on-line. This also gives the project managers real time data on how their respective projects are being bid and if additional classifications or other advertising

may be necessary to successfully solicit the project.

I have utilized the customized features in setting up “My Contractor’s” database on contractors that have performed well on previous projects by ranking them and then using that filter to solicit quotes only from those contractors (on certain projects) that have the ranking I desire. These types of projects are generally less than \$100,000 in value and are precluded from formal bidding procedures. 

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