

FirstNet FAQ

Q. What is FirstNet?

A. Signed into law on February 22, 2012, the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act created the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet). The law gives FirstNet the mission to build, operate and maintain the first high-speed, nationwide wireless broadband network dedicated to public safety. FirstNet will provide a single interoperable platform for emergency and daily public safety communications. This broadband network will fulfill a fundamental need of the public safety community as well as the last remaining recommendation of the 9/11 Commission. FirstNet will bring 21st century tools to tens of thousands of organizations and individuals that respond to emergencies at the local, state, tribal and federal levels.

Q. Why does law enforcement need FirstNet?

A. FirstNet will be designed so that it can stand up to criminal events by rerouting rapidly if portions of the network are destroyed or compromised. During emergencies like the Boston Marathon bombing, wireless traffic is concentrated in specific areas and capacity can become insufficient for public safety's needs. Public safety needs an exclusive network so they can communicate without interruption. This is especially important during large emergencies or special events when consumers may possibly overload commercial wireless networks to reach their family and friends. FirstNet will provide public safety with a priority communications network and situational awareness when they need it most. During structural fires, crimes in process or medical emergencies, the ability to share real-time images and video of the scene as well as the locations of responders and locally relevant information improves communication and outcomes. FirstNet will carry high-speed data, location information, images, and eventually streaming video that can mean the difference between life and death.

Q. What is the cost for my agency to use FirstNet?

A. FirstNet is a federal program that is mandated to offer an affordable solution for public safety entities. Though the specific cost has not been determined, the FirstNet affordable solution should compete with the agencies current communications costs. The specific cost will become available when a vendor has been chosen and has worked with FirstNet on the pricing.

Q. Who will operate FirstNet?

A. FirstNet is an independent authority within the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). Near the end of 2017 each Governor will be required to either opt-in, or opt-out of being directly in charge of FirstNet in his/her state. In an opt-in scenario, FirstNet will be responsible for managing core operations and RAN operations. FirstNet also will enable robust identity management and authentication practices at the local level. However, if a Governor decides to opt- out, then he/she is required to notify FirstNet, NTIA, and the FCC. After providing the notification, the Governor has 180 days to develop and complete requests for proposals for the construction, maintenance and operation of the RAN within the State. The State then is required to submit an alternative plan to the FCC that is interoperable with the NPSBN and complies with the minimum technical interoperability requirements under the Act. There are additional funding implications if a state receives approval to build its own RAN. These include states paying any fees associated with using FirstNet core elements. There will be grants available to states to partially cover these costs. NTIA will determine eligible costs of the grant program.

Source: http://www.firstnet.gov/sites/default/files/FirstNet%20and%20Elected%20Officials_150901.pdf

Q. Will law enforcement have local control of FirstNet in their area/city?

A. A part of First Net’s plan to have a defined level of control over local areas. First Net has organized the different elements of local governments into two functional groupings: Direct Control and Indirect Control. First Net defines direct and indirect control as “Direct Control refers to those areas we felt would best be met with a program that allows public safety to directly configure the operations of the network to their own needs. Indirect Control refers to those areas that would best be met through collaboration between the Awardee and the public safety entities (PSEs).”

The Elements under Direct control includes:

Quality of Service, Priority and Preemption (QPP) – This provides authorized users the ability to raise or lower settings of one or more users

Users & Groups – provides authorized users the ability to manage users and groups within their control and map these to roles and profiles

Roles & Profiles – provides authorized users the ability to manage roles & profiles that simplify user management

Devices & Provisioning – provides authorized users the ability to manage devices and the provisioning of those devices on the network

Applications & Services – provides authorized users the ability to whitelist and blacklist applications and assign applications to specific users or devices

The Elements under Indirect control include:

Planned & Unplanned Events – establishes the operating procedures for agencies to coordinate specific requests from FirstNet in support of upcoming planned events or manmade or natural unplanned events

Reusable Assets – refers to the operating procedures to ensure FirstNet customers and the Awardee maximize the productivity of agency owned or controlled resources

Onboarding & Support – establishes the details of how the Awardee will support our PSE partners to ensure a smooth start and ongoing operations for every FirstNet customer

Source: <http://www.firstnet.gov/newsroom/blog/local-control-and-npsbn>.

Q. Will law enforcement agencies be required to use FirstNet?

A. No. Building and operating a nationwide broadband network to meet the needs of public safety is the primary purpose of FirstNet, but public-safety users are not required to adopt the FirstNet system. Thus, the FirstNet offering needs to be attractive enough from the performance and financial standpoints to convince public safety to subscribe to the network.