Big Blue loses job to Miami-Dade's IT department

It's not every day that IBM is on the losing end of a bid for technology work.

But when it came to setting up an online procurement process for Miami-Dade County, IBM didn’t get the job. It went instead to the county’s Information Technology department.

In the process, the county is paying only $85,000 — about one-fourth of IBM’s asking price — for the work of setting up the website and the infrastructure behind it.

“We found IBM prohibitive,” says Theodore G. Lucas, director of the county’s department of procurement management.

Lucas says that the county had entertained bids from several top IT providers including IBM. The county singled out IBM and began negotiating a contract for doing the procurement office’s work.

But Lucas says that after several months of negotiations, he just didn’t feel comfortable with the time and money IBM said would be necessary for the project. So Lucas asked his staff for alternatives.

That’s when the IT department was asked to submit a bid for a job that will automate a department that spends $900 million a year to purchase goods and services for the county and deals with some 4,000 vendors.

“It’s good to know that the county has the caliber of people who can compete

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WINNING TEAM: Miami-Dade County’s procurement department is setting up an online purchasing system so vendors can see what goods and services the county needs. From left, the team includes Lillian Forbes, Paul Grandio, Leonor Marrero, Orlando Suarez, Ted Lucas and Mary Baker.

with the best in the industry,” says Orlando Suarez, division director of the county’s IT department and project manager for this project.

Setting up the e-procurement service is a priority for Miami-Dade, which has been given a mandate by County Manager Steve Shiver to use technology to make government more efficient and accessible.

“We do this now with paper and stamps,” adds Lucas.

Putting it all online will make it much easier. Vendors can register online. Details on requests for proposals and updates will be delivered via e-mail. Confirmations will be sent that way, too.

Lucas made sure that his county colleagues were mindful of their task.

He wrote a contract between the procurement office and IT department. It includes performance measures and incentives for finishing the job by its July 1 deadline as well as penalties for missing the final mark.

But he had no doubts that the IT folks were up to the job.

The department had already tackled several similar assignments, including automating the permit process for the county’s film office.

IBM, for its part, already does a fair amount of work with Miami-Dade County.

A company spokesperson says “it’s not unusual for clients to take IT work in-house. But the county remains a valued customer.”