Texas A&M eyes deal for new biosecurity center
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The A&M System has assembled a team to vie for a federal award of up to $1.2 billion for a biosecurity center that could rapidly create vaccines to fight emerging infectious diseases and other threats, it announced Friday.

No local impact study has been conducted, but the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center -- one of an unknown number of competitors for the project -- estimates it would create roughly 1,000 jobs directly and 6,000 indirectly, said Brett Giroir, the A&M System's vice chancellor for strategic initiatives.

The project award from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Giroir said, could mean "hundreds of millions of dollars up front in federal investment, and a 25-year potential commitment."

Giroir said the A&M System would be desirable to the government because of infrastructure investments it has made, including system institute the National Center for Therapeutics Manufacturing.

"It has established a completely different technological platform that we really believe will transform the biopharmaceutical industry," Giroir said.

The government wants the new centers -- Giroir expects two or three to be created as part of this process -- to have the manufacturing infrastructure to create at least 50 million doses of a pandemic flu vaccine within four months, and also to help train the workforce to keep the industry in the U.S.

Additionally, the centers would provide services to companies working with the government so they would have a one-stop facility to make a finished product. At A&M, it would also be expected to bring in revenue through manufacturing commercial vaccines.

The A&M System has enlisted a team of more than 20 partners -- with more expected to be announced soon -- that include GlaxoSmithKline Biologicals, one of the world's leading vaccine developers and manufacturers, top biotechnology equipment company Sartorius, and Bavarian Nordic, which has a major federal contract to provide the next generation of smallpox vaccine.

"This is clearly, in my mind, the cream of the crop in the area -- these are the partners we want to be working with," Giroir said. "Whether we win this or not, the fact that these partners have teamed with us should be an objective illustration that what we've been doing has been very significant."

It's unclear how much the National Center for Innovation in Advanced Development and Manufacturing would cost the A&M System.

The A&M System, its team and the federal government would share the cost of the manufacturing facility's construction. An A&M System spokesman said costs weren't known at this point but would be paid for through bonds.

The partners and the federal government would co-own the buildings while they are being constructed, and ownership would be turned over to the partners when they are finished, Giroir said.

Bryan owns the 147-acre tract of land, some of which is in College Station, on which the project would be located. The cities' mayors negotiated for months regarding sharing infrastructure costs and new tax revenue from the proposed "Research Valley Biocorridor." College Station's city council has approved the agreement, and Bryan's is set to consider it Tuesday.

A&M's proposal will run to more than 1,000 pages and is due in late June. Giroir expects a decision by DHHS around December. The group or groups selected would then enter into contract negotiations.