

Notice of Intent to Certify Sole Source

To: Interested Parties

From: Craig P. Orgeron, CPM, Ph.D.

CC: ITS Project Number 49016

Date: September 2, 2025

Re: Sole Source Certification Number 4706 to provide Cyber Ecosystem training and simulation software for Mississippi State University (MSU)

Contact Name: Vershonda Grindle

Contact Phone Number: 601-432- 8213

Contact E-mail Address: Vershonda.grindle@its.ms.gov

Sole Source Certification Award Details

Regarding Information Technology Services (ITS) Sole Source Certification Number 4706 for Mississippi State University (MSU), please be advised that ITS intends to award By Light Professional IT Services LLC as the sole source provider of Cyber Ecosystem training and simulation software for one year in an amount not to exceed \$292,500.00. If MSU opts to renew the Cyber Ecosystem training and simulation software, this sole source certification shall be valid for two additional years. Please be advised that ITS will determine if additional licenses, enhancements, upgrades, support, or equipment are within scope during the certification period and may increase the spending authority accordingly. Should By Light Professional IT Services LLC change their name during this certification period, then ITS will determine if a recertification is necessary. For an explanation regarding Mississippi state law, policy and procedures for sole source procurements, refer to Attachment B: Sole Source Procurement Overview.

Sole Source Criteria

1. The product or services being purchased must perform a function for which no other product or source of services exists:

The Cyberoperations Enhanced Network & Training Simulators (CENTS®) is a patented and proprietary cybersecurity training and simulation platform that supports academic and military Information Technology/Operations Technology professionals that can only be purchased through By Light. It offers a realistic, hands-on cyber range where students, researchers, and military personnel can build and improve their skills by tackling real world cybersecurity challenges. The system is military-grade certified, with an Authorization to Operate (ATO) label, meeting strict federal cybersecurity standards and making the system a trusted choice for other organizations.

2. The purchaser must be able to show specific business objectives that can be met only through the unique product or services:

The Mississippi Cyber Initiative (MCI) Ecosystem utilizes network modeling schemes emulating network designs developed by the MCI Cyber Team. During the initial deployment, the MCI Cyber Team and military partners modeled a complete wide area network where all partnered agencies can participate in cyber training exercises. Utilizing common cybersecurity tools, participants gain experience in administering, maintaining, defending, or exploiting a network environment. The system is capable of Hardware in the Loop which can integrate industrial control systems. The MCI system is compatible with commercial software licensing (i.e., Microsoft, pfSense, Vyatta) to support its modeling realism. The product is utilized by MSU's military partners who administer, maintain, and exploit network environments. The training platform provides real world emulations providing training with environments modeled after real IT networks. MSU MCI Cyber Team is responsible for the administration and maintenance of the cyber ecosystem; receiving training as needed on new upgrades as released during the year required.

3. The product or services must be available only from the manufacturer and not through resellers who could submit competitive pricing for the product or services:

By Light's CENTS® operates exclusively on By Light's proprietary SLMA-R/RangeOS software. This software is developed, maintained, and solely distributed by By Light. No third-party vendor is authorized to license or support this platform. The Vendor's sole source certification letter is included as Attachment A.

Schedule

Task	Date
First Advertisement Date	09/02/25
Second Advertisement Date	09/09/25
Response Deadline From Objectors	09/16/25 at 3:00 P.M. Central Time
Notice of Award/No Award Posted	Not before 09/17/25

Project Details

Mississippi State University (MSU) will utilize the Cyber Ecosystem to provide real world IT training to academic partners and Mississippi National Guard affiliates. The solution, implemented in 2023, is a hybrid capability consisting of purchased hardware and software as a service. Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College (MGCCC) procured and purchased the solution in collaboration with MSU's MCI for \$1,400,000.00. The purchase marks the beginning of MSU's direct investment in the initiative.

Submission Instructions and Format of Response from Objecting Parties

Interested parties who have reason to believe that the Cyber Ecosystem training and simulation software should not be certified as a sole source should provide information in the following format for the state to use in determining whether or not to proceed with awarding the Sole Source contract to By Light Professional IT Services LLC.

1.1 Interested Party Information

1.1.1 Contact Name, Phone Number and email address

- 1.1.2 Company Website URL, if applicable
- 1.2 Objection to Sole Source Certification
 - 1.2.1 Interested parties must present specific objections to the Sole Source certification using the criteria listed above.
 - 1.2.2 A statement regarding the Interested Party's capabilities as related to this Sole Source Certification Request.
- 1.3 Comments will be accepted at any time prior to Tuesday, September 16, 2025, at 3:00 p.m. (Central Time) to Vershonda Grindle at vershonda.grindle@its.ms.gov or at the Mississippi Department of Information Technology Services, 3771 Eastwood Drive, Jackson, Mississippi 39211. Responses may be delivered by hand, via regular mail, overnight delivery, e-mail or by fax. Fax number is (601) 713-6380. ITS WILL NOT BE RESPONSIBLE FOR DELAYS IN THE DELIVERY OF RESPONSES. It is solely the responsibility of the Interested Parties that responses reach ITS on time. Interested Parties may contact Vershonda Grindle to verify the receipt of their Responses. Responses received after the deadline will be rejected.
- 1.4 Interested Party responses should include the following information:

SUBMITTED IN RESPONSE TO
Sole Source Certification No. 4706-49016
Accepted until September 16, 2025 @ 3:00 p.m.,
ATTENTION: Vershonda Grindle

If you have any questions concerning the information above or if we can be of further assistance, please contact Vershonda Grindle at 601-432-8213 or via email at vershonda.grindle@its.ms.gov.

Attachment A: Vendor Correspondence
Attachment B: Sole Source Procurement Overview



June 05, 2025

Subject: Sole Source Justification for Procurement of CENTS® License and Maintenance

To Whom It May Concern:

By Light's Cyberoperations Enhanced Network & Training Simulators (CENTS®) operate exclusively on our proprietary SLAM-R/RangeOS software. This software is developed, maintained, and solely distributed by By Light.

The license and maintenance agreement provided by By Light/CyberCENTS® includes critical components such as technical support, regular software updates, and ongoing compatibility assurances. These elements are essential to ensure the uninterrupted functionality and security of the cyber range environment. No third-party vendor is authorized to license or support this platform.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to providing our services to your organization.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Katie Nolan".

KATIE NOLAN
Director of Operations, CyberCENTS

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By Light Professional IT Services LLC
FRM 8240-09 | April 11, 2024

Attachment B

The acquisition of information technology for all state agencies and institutions of higher learning (IHLs) is within the scope of the ITS law, found in Mississippi Code Section 25-53-1, et seq., and the policies and procedures established in accordance with this statute, found in the ITS Procurement Handbook posted on the ITS website (www.its.ms.gov).

ITS enabling legislation requires that information technology hardware, software and services be acquired in a manner that insures the maximum of competition among all manufacturers and suppliers of such equipment and services. Accordingly, ITS promotes full and open competition through the issuance of open specifications and the objective evaluation of Interested Party proposals to determine the lowest and best offering to meet an agency's or public university's business requirements. True competition protects the integrity and credibility of purchasing in the public sector and is essential in providing best value and adequate contractual protection for the purchasing entity. In certain limited situations, information technology acquisitions may be sole-sourced.

ITS utilizes the provisions of Public Purchasing Law for Sole Source and Emergency procurements of information technology. Mississippi Public Purchasing Law (Mississippi Code Section 31-7-13) specifies that noncompetitive items available from one source only be exempted from bid requirements (sole-sourced). ITS statute, in Section 25-53-5 (p), permits ITS to utilize provisions in Public Purchasing Law or regulations, when applicable.

Per Public Purchasing law, acquisitions must meet the following criteria to be authorized as sole source:

1. The product or services being purchased must perform a function for which no other product or source of services exists,
2. The purchaser must be able to show specific business objectives that can be met only through the unique product or services, AND
3. The product or services must be available only from the manufacturer and NOT through resellers who could submit competitive pricing for the product or services. The vendor's correspondence regarding this criterion for this project is included as Attachment A.

By policy as documented in the ITS Procurement Handbook, acquisitions of IT services must include the following information to be authorized as sole source:

1. An explanation about why the amount to be expended is reasonable, and
2. An explanation regarding the efforts by the purchaser to obtain the best possible price.

For state agencies, approval of all technology purchases with a lifecycle cost of \$5,000 or less, including sole source purchases, has been delegated to the agency. The ITS Procurement Limits Policies for Agencies (a section in the ITS Procurement Handbook) require a minimum of two competitive written bids or proposals for technology purchases with a lifecycle cost over \$5,000 but not over \$75,000 (not over \$25,000 for projects funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act). Since, for single source items, the procuring agency will be unable to obtain two written bids, ITS must certify all sole source acquisitions of information technology with a lifecycle cost greater than \$5,000.

Institutions of Higher Learning (IHLs) or public universities have been delegated the authority to certify sole source procurements up to \$250,000 lifecycle cost under the ITS Procurement Limits Policies for IHLs (a section in the ITS Procurement Handbook). For the certification of sole source procurements delegated to the CIOs at public universities, the public university must follow ITS' Sole Source Procedure, including advertisement of the intent to award as sole source. Institutions certifying a sole source purchase must ensure the criteria listed above are met and documented in writing by the institution and the Interested Party prior to certifying a product or service as sole source. Sole source documentation must be reviewed and approved by the IHL's CIO for any sole-source certification above \$5,000. All sole source documentation should be retained in the public university's procurement file. Sole source requests above \$250,000 lifecycle cost require ITS approval.

Other than the delegations outlined above, all sole source technology procurements must be certified by ITS.

ITS thoroughly reviews Sole Source Certification Requests, determining if competing products and/or services exist. If so, ITS conducts a competitive procurement. If ITS' review confirms the sole source, then a Sole Source advertisement is issued, giving other Interested Parties an opportunity to identify competing products and/or services. Based upon the results of the Sole Source advertisement, ITS will either certify the request as a sole source or conduct a competitive procurement.