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**DECISION**



**THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL  
OF THE UNITED STATES**  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

*[Protest of Air Force Contract Award]*

FILE: B-199177

DATE: March 5, 1981

MATTER OF: Centron DPL Company **DLC 06248**

**DIGEST:**

1. Protester contends that RFP for computer system requires initially acquired central processor to have inherent capability to accommodate 100-percent growth in "throughput" without change in model of central processor. Contracting agency contends that RFP allowed offerors to propose meeting growth requirement either by adding components to existing processor or by replacing processor with more capable model. Protest is denied since reasonable reading of RFP supports agency's position.
2. Allegation that awardee's proposed expansion of "throughput" rate by replacing existing central processor would require major operating system change is denied where contracting agency contests allegation and protester has not proved its technical position.
3. Cost of implementing possible growth in "throughput" rate was properly excluded from award evaluation since cost did not relate to initial computer system to be acquired and RFP provided that only initial system costs would be evaluated.

Centron DPL Company (Centron) protests the Department of the Air Force's award of a contract (for delivery and acceptance of a Prototype Mission Operations Center Computer System) to Federal Data Corporation (FDC) under request for proposals (RFP) No. FO-3701-80-R-0073 which was issued by the Air

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Force on February 21, 1980. The contract required the delivery of a Main Frame Computer, associated peripherals and operating software for the required computer system.

Centron contends that the FDC computer system did not comply with an RFP requirement relating to "system throughput"; moreover, Centron insists that the Air Force erroneously evaluated the effects on the computer system stemming from FDC's proposed method of complying with the requirement. Centron further argues that the cost the Air Force will ultimately incur in obtaining a system in compliance with the "throughput" requirement will exceed the price of the Centron proposal by more than \$1 million and that the Air Force therefore erroneously determined FDC to have the lowest price for the requirement.

We will discuss these issues in the order discussed above.

#### "System Throughput"

As to the "system throughput" requirements involved, the RFP provided:

##### "3.1.2 - Operating Performance"

"The computer system must be capable of supporting a 100% growth in throughput and internal main storage capacity and 300% growth in online direct access storage capacity. This growth must be accommodated with minimum impact on application programs.

##### "3.2.1 - Central Processor"

"(b) Expansion. The capability shall exist, through the upgrading or addition of components, and without modification to the application software, to increase throughput by a factor of two. The throughput expansion requirement shall be

satisfied by a single central processing unit. Several processors of lesser capability may not be combined in multiprocessing network to achieve the required capacity."

The record shows that the Air Force considered FDC's proposal to be responsive to the above "throughput" requirements specifying a "100% growth" capability because the company "offered to replace IBM CPU Model No. 4341 with an IBM CPU Model No. 3032" which can perform at the specified "growth" rate. The Air Force viewed FDC's replacement offer as consistent with RFP provision 3.2.1, above. As stated by the Air Force:

"It is our contention that the solicitation clearly provided that expansion of the central processor could be achieved by either improving the existing processor [by the addition of components] or by [upgrading the central processor] with a more capable model, and that FDC's proposal was technically responsive. \* \* \*

"Upgrade, in the requirement that expansion of capacity shall exist through upgrading [the central processor] is mutually exclusive from the alternate technique of modification by addition of components. The statement in the specification was specifically written to cover expansion known to be available for both CDC and IBM models to insure an unbiased selection."

Centron contends that the RFP requires the initially acquired central processor to have an inherent capability to accommodate 100-percent growth in its execution rate without changing the model of the central processor. Thus, Centron concludes that the phrase "upgrading or addition of components" can only be read to require expansion by the addition of components to the initially acquired central processor which is mandated to have the inherent capability to achieve a 100-percent increase in "throughput."

The Air Force intent was to permit the "throughput" growth requirement either by "upgrading" (that is, allowing the contractor to replace the initial central processor with a more capable central processor) or by the addition of components to the computer system without a change in the central processor. We consider that this intent was reasonably evident in the RFP since provision 3.2.1, above, permitted the upgrading of the components of the central processor without restriction. Obviously, one way of upgrading all components of the central processor would be through the replacement of the central processor with a more capable model as FDC proposed. Thus, we cannot question the Air Force's finding that FDC's proposal complied with the "throughput" requirements.

#### Upgrade Effects on FDC's Computer System

Centron alleges that "moving from the 4341 to the 3032 would require a major operating \* \* \* change [in FDC's computer system], in order to achieve efficient operation" and that the change in central processors will result in "modification to the application software" contrary to RFP provision 3.2.1, above. In rebuttal, the Air Force alleges that "the Government engineers contend that the operating system is compatible with both models."

At the outset, we note that in resolving cases in which a protester, as here, challenges the validity of a technical evaluation, it is not the function of our Office to evaluate proposals in order to determine which should have been selected for award. The determination of the relative merits of proposals is the responsibility of the procuring agency since it must bear the burden of any difficulties incurred by reason of a defective evaluation. C.L. Systems, Inc., B-197123, June 30, 1980, 80-1 CPD 448. In light of this, we have held that procuring officials enjoy a reasonable degree of discretion in the evaluation of proposals and such discretion must not be disturbed unless shown to be arbitrary or in violation of the procurement statutes and regulations. International Technological Associates,

Inc., B-194398.1, July 23, 1979, 79-2 CPD 47. Thus, our Office will not substitute its judgment for that of the procuring agency by making an independent determination. John M. Cockerham & Associates, Inc; Decision Planning Corporation, B-193124, March 14, 1979, 79-1 CPD 180. Additionally, the protester has the burden of affirmatively proving its case. Reliable Maintenance Service, Inc.--request for reconsideration, B-185103, May 24, 1976, 76-1 CPD 337.

Considering these principles, it is our view that Centron has not proved that FDC's proposed change in central processors will constitute a "major operating system change" or that the change would be contrary to the restriction concerning "application software" in RFP provision 3.2.1.

#### Cost Effects of Meeting Throughput Requirement

Centron also argues that the Air Force improperly failed to evaluate the cost effect of FDC's proposed offer to meet the "100% growth" capability through replacing an IBM Model 4341 central processor with an IBM Model 3032. Centron insists that the added cost of replacing the IBM Model 4341 will exceed the present price of the Centron proposal by more than \$1 million.

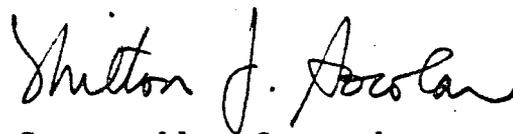
The Air Force insists that it properly excluded the costs of the proposed IBM model switch in determining the lowest price proposal since the RFP excluded the costs of "contingency planning" as a cost evaluation factor. As stated in the RFP: "Cost to the Government (applies to Initial System Acquisition Costs and to Projected Operational Cost only)."

The Air Force further explains:

"Department of Defense Directive 5000.28 and Air Force Regulation 800-1 define Life Cycle Costs as cost of acquisition and ownership costs. The \* \* \* definition of acquisition cost and ownership costs does not provide for contingency planning as a factor in LCC."

Even though offerors had to demonstrate that their proposed systems could support the "100% growth in throughput," it is obvious that the initial system was not required to actually possess the higher "throughput" rate. For example, the "throughput" rate of the initially acquired system was specified to be only 50 percent of the "growth" rate. Further, it is obvious that the Air Force was to retain the complete discretion in deciding when, and if, the growth rate was to be implemented. Therefore, we cannot disagree with the Air Force's position that the cost of implementing the growth rate (in the case of FDC's proposal, the higher priced IBM model central processor) was properly excluded from the cost evaluation since it was not an "initial system" cost.

Protest denied.



Acting Comptroller General  
of the United States