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Decision

Matter of: Encentric, Inc.

File: B-412368.3

Date: April 19, 2016

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Daniel R. Forman, Esq., John E. McCarthy Jr., Esq., and Hart W. Wood, Esq., Crowell & Moring LLP, for Buchanan & Edwards, Inc., the intervenor.

Tudo N. Pham, Esq., Department of State, for the agency.

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DIGEST

In a best-value procurement, agency reasonably selected higher-rated and lower-priced quotation for issuance of a task order, where evaluation was consistent with the solicitation's stated evaluation criteria and the agency's conclusions were reasonably based.

DECISION

Encentric, Inc., a small business headquartered in Fairfax, Virginia, and the incumbent contractor, protests the issuance of a task order to Buchanan and Edwards, Inc., (B&E), located in Arlington, Virginia, under request for quotations (RFQ) No. SAQMMA15Q0209, issued by the Department of State, for maintenance, operation, and management of PeopleSoft v9.x or later in a production environment, including any follow-on functional requirements and application support. This competition was conducted among firms holding one of the General Services Administration's (GSA) 8(a) Streamlined Technology Acquisition Resources for Services II (STARS II) government-wide acquisition contracts.¹

We deny the protest.

¹ Because the value of the task order is over \$10 million, our Office has jurisdiction to review this protest. 41 U.S.C. § 4106(f)(1)(B).

BACKGROUND

The RFQ, which was issued on August 13, 2015, contemplated the issuance of a performance-based labor-hour task order with a one-year base period and four one-year options. RFQ at 3; AR, Tab 9, Award Recommendation, at 1. The task order was to be issued on a best-value basis, considering the following five technical factors: (1) technical approach; (2) management approach; (3) personnel; (4) understanding of the requirements, organization and scope of work; and (5) past performance, in addition to cost/price.² RFQ at 44. The RFQ established that technical merit was significantly more important than cost/price. Id.

As relevant here, under the management approach factor, the RFQ instructed vendors to include, among other things, a description of the organizational structure they intended to use to satisfy the contract requirements. RFQ at 45. Vendors were also directed to address corporate experience under this factor by including a discussion of corporate ability and experience with Department of State and human resources specific software applications. Id. The RFQ provided that the management approach factor would be evaluated to determine how clearly the contractor demonstrated its organizational structure; the extent to which the vendor's corporate experience demonstrates its capability to explore, apply, and employ technologies and techniques required for the RFQ; and how well the vendor described its performance measurements. Id.

Regarding the personnel factor, the RFQ required vendors to propose personnel for three key personnel positions, including a project manager and a senior functional lead. RFQ at 12. The solicitation listed minimum acceptable criteria for each key personnel position, as well as detailed descriptions of each position.³ RFQ at 12-19. Of relevance to the protest here, among the minimum requirements for the position of project manager were "5+ years Project Management experience" and "3+ years Project Management experience on a People[S]oft project." RFQ at 17. Also of relevance, among the minimum requirements for the position of senior functional lead were "2+ years as People[S]oft Lead Analyst." RFQ at 19. Vendors were required to provide a resume for each person proposed to fill a key position, and the solicitation provided that the agency would evaluate the qualifications and experience of the vendor's proposed key personnel. RFQ at 11, 47. With regard to the resumes, vendors were advised that the resumes for the proposed personnel

² The RFQ provided that the non-price factors would be evaluated using an adjectival rating scheme, and would be rated exceptional, acceptable, marginal, or unacceptable. RFQ at 44.

³ For example, the detailed description of the project manager position included 40 separate bullet points. RFQ at 12-13.

“shall meet or exceed the technical qualifications for the position for which they are proposed” and “explicitly express how the proposed individual(s) meet the required experience level.” RFQ at 46.

On August 24, the agency received questions from interested vendors. The RFQ was amended on August 31 to include questions and answers, and to establish a new due date, September 8, for the submission of quotations. The agency received three quotations in response to the RFQ, including quotations from Encentric and B&E. Contracting Officer’s (CO) Statement at 3. The technical evaluation panel (TEP) provided the results of its technical evaluation to staff in the office of acquisitions, which then conducted a cost/price analysis. Id. at 3. The order was issued to B&E on September 30, and unsuccessful vendors were notified on October 8.

Encentric filed a protest of the order with our office on October 19, before receiving a written debriefing on October 26. Following the debriefing, Encentric filed a supplemental protest with our Office, and on November 6, the agency informed our Office that it intended to take corrective action by conducting an evaluation of all technical proposals and issuing a new selection decision based on the new evaluation.⁴ On November 12, our Office dismissed the protest as academic. See Encentric, Inc., B-412368; B-412368.2, Nov. 12, 2015 (unpublished decision).

Thereafter, the agency appointed a new TEP, which evaluated the quotations. The results of the evaluation were as follows:

Technical Factor	Encentric	B&E
Technical Approach	Exceptional	Exceptional
Management Approach	Acceptable	Acceptable
Personnel	Marginal	Exceptional
Understanding of the Requirements, Organization and Scope of Work	Exceptional	Exceptional
Past Performance	Significant Confidence	Significant Confidence
Overall Technical Rating	Acceptable	Exceptional
Price	\$16,841,905	\$16,449,557

⁴ While this protest deals with a request for quotations, the record contains numerous references to proposals. Similarly, while B&E was selected for the issuance of a task order, certain documents in the record use the term award. Where necessary for the sake of consistency, we have used the language in the record in our decision.

Agency Report (AR), Tab 9, Award Recommendation, at 24. The agency assigned two weaknesses to Encentric's quotation under the personnel factor, which resulted in its lower rating for the factor and contributed to Encentric's lower overall technical rating. AR, Tab 8, Consensus Technical Evaluation, at 14.

The TEP provided its findings to the source selection authority (SSA). Using the TEP's findings of strength and weakness, the SSA compared the quotations. Based on this comparative analysis, the SSA concluded that B&E, which submitted the highest-rated and lowest-priced quotation, represented the best value to the government. AR, Tab 9, Award Recommendation, at 46.

The agency notified Encentric of its decision on January 8, 2016. CO Statement at 4. After receiving a written debriefing on January 8, Encentric filed this protest with our Office on January 13. Id.

DISCUSSION

Encentric argues that the agency's evaluation was unreasonable and the source selection decision flawed. Specifically, Encentric argues that it should have received higher ratings under the personnel and management approach factors.⁵ Our review of the record provides no basis upon which to conclude that the agency's evaluation or selection decision was unreasonable.

Personnel Factor

As noted above, Encentric and B&E received equivalent ratings under each technical factor, with the exception of the personnel factor. Encentric received a marginal rating under the personnel factor because its quotation failed to demonstrate that two of the protester's proposed key personnel satisfied the minimum solicitation requirements. In particular, the evaluators found as follows:

- The RFQ requires 5+ years of experience as stated on p.17. The [RFQ] also requires [the proposed project manager] to have project management experience specific to PeopleSoft ("3+ years [p]roject [m]anagement experience on a PeopleSoft project . . ."). The Encentric proposal states that [its proposed project manager] has over 20 years of IT project management experience and 10 years of functional experience . . . however, in [the candidate's] resume, only 2 years of

⁵ While we do not address every argument raised by the protester in this decision, we have considered all of the arguments and concluded that none provided a basis for sustaining the protest.

her project management experience . . . fully qualifies her for the position based on the [RFQ] position description.

- The RFQ requires the [f]unctional lead to have 2+ years of experience as a functional lead analyst (RFQ p. 19). The Encentric proposal states that [the proposed functional lead] has 17 years of IT experience and 15 years working with PeopleSoft. However, according to [the candidate's] resume . . . he only has one year of experience that fully meets the requirements as written in the [RFQ].

AR, Tab 9, Award Recommendation, at 14.

Encentric challenges the weaknesses identified by the agency, arguing that the agency used unstated evaluation criteria in evaluating Encentric's proposed project manager, and that the agency failed to carefully read the resumes of its proposed project manager and proposed senior functional lead before concluding that they lacked the required experience.

In reviewing a protest challenging an agency's technical evaluation, our Office will not reevaluate quotations; rather, we will examine the record to determine whether the agency's evaluation was reasonable and consistent with the terms of the solicitation and applicable procurement statutes and regulations. Consummate Computer Consultants Sys., LLC, B-410566.2, June 8, 2015, 2015 CPD ¶ 176 at 4. A protester's disagreement with the agency's judgments does not establish that the evaluation was unreasonable. Id. Here, the record fails to support Encentric's position that the agency's evaluation was unreasonable, and the protester's arguments amount to nothing more than disagreement with the agency's evaluation.

The first weakness assigned to Encentric's quotation under the personnel factor was based on Encentric's failure to clearly demonstrate that its proposed project manager satisfied the minimum requirements for at least five years of project management experience and at least three years of project management experience on a PeopleSoft project. AR, Tab 8, Consensus Technical Evaluation, at 14. As noted above, the evaluators found that while Encentric's quotation stated that the proposed project manager had over twenty years of IT project management experience, the work experience described in the candidate's resume indicated only two years of qualifying project management experience. Id. Further, according to the TEP chairperson, the TEP concluded that while the proposed project manager had experience with PeopleSoft, she did not have "a project management role in any of her PeopleSoft experience as she only held responsibilities commensurate to an analyst position[;]" thus, she did not have "experience managing projects or staff while working on a People[S]oft project."⁶ AR, Tab 3, TEP Statement at 1.

⁶ The protester argues that the statement of the TEP chairperson is an improper post-hoc rationalization, which should be excluded from consideration under the

(continued...)

In challenging this weakness, the protester first argues that the agency relied on an unstated evaluation criterion when it concluded that the proposed project manager did not have sufficient experience that matched the description of the project management responsibilities to be performed under the task order. AR, Tab 8, Consensus Technical Evaluation, at 14. According to Encentric, the agency relied on an unstated evaluation criterion when it essentially faulted the protester for failing to copy and paste all forty of the RFQ's individual bullet points into its description of its project manager's experience. Comments at 7. We disagree.

When evaluating a quotation, an agency properly may take into account specific, albeit not expressly identified, matters that are logically encompassed by or related to the stated evaluation criteria. Sigmatech, Inc., B-410933, March 18, 2015, 2015 CPD ¶ 110 at 8. Here, the RFQ expressly described the duties of a project manager, and set requirements for years of experience in that position. The fact that the TEP relied upon that description when it attempted to discern whether any of the work experience listed in the resume qualified as project manager experience is consistent with the terms of the solicitation and does not involve reliance on an unstated criterion. RFQ at 46.

Additionally, the record demonstrates that, contrary to the protester's assertion, the agency did not require it to address each bullet point from the description in order to demonstrate that its proposed key personnel met the minimum experience requirements. In fact, the TEP credited the protester's proposed project manager with two years of project manager experience based on a brief description of the proposed project manager's employment from September 2001 to August 2003. AR, Tab 8, Consensus Technical Evaluation, at 14.

(...continued)

rationale set forth by our Office in Boeing Sikorsky Aircraft Support, B-277263.2, B-277263.3, Sept. 29, 1997, 97-2 CPD ¶ 91. In Boeing, our Office observed that while we consider the entire record, we accord greater weight to contemporaneous source selection materials rather than judgments, such as reevaluations made in response to protest contentions. Id. at 11. However, the TEP chairperson's explanations are not post-hoc rationalizations, as the protester contends. Boeing is irrelevant in situations such as here, where the agency offers post-protest explanations that provide a detailed rationale for contemporaneous conclusions and simply fill in previously unrecorded details. Such explanations will generally be considered in our review of the rationality of selection decisions, so long as those explanations are credible and consistent with the contemporaneous record. Management Sys. Int'l, Inc., B-409415, B-409415.2, Apr. 2, 2014, 2014 CPD ¶ 117 at 6. Here, we find the agency's explanation to be both credible, and consistent with the contemporaneous written record. INDUS Tech., Inc., et al., Sept. 29, 2015, 2015 CPD ¶ 304 at 5.

The protester next argues that, had the agency carefully read the candidate's resume, the agency would have found that it clearly showed that she had at least six years of experience performing project management tasks. Comments at 8. Specifically, the protester argues that the agency should have credited the proposed project manager with project management experience based on her employment as a senior business systems analyst between August 2003 and August 2007. Protest at 17. In response, the agency argues that while the candidate's resume indicated that she managed a project as a senior business systems analyst, the resume did not provide sufficient information to allow the TEP to determine whether the candidate had the type of project manager experience required by the solicitation, which included "experience managing people . . . team performance, contracts and company resources." AR, Tab 3, TEP Statement at 2.

Essentially, the protester's argument here is based upon the assumption that the agency should be required to cobble together and draw broad inferences from the information provided in the resumes in order to conclude that the requirements of the RFQ were met. We have previously rejected that argument where, as here, the solicitation required that resumes clearly demonstrate how the proposed individuals meet the required experience level. See Consummate Computer Consultants Sys., LLC, supra, at 6. Ultimately, it is a vendor's responsibility to submit an adequately written quotation that establishes its technical capability and the merits of its proposed approach, and allows for a meaningful review by the procuring agency in accordance with the evaluation terms of the solicitation. Id.

Here, while the resume contained a bare assertion that the candidate had "over 20 years of information technology . . . project management in the commercial, state, and public sectors with the past ten years emphasizing PeopleSoft implementations and support for the federal government," the accompanying work histories did not clearly demonstrate that the proposed project manager had the experience required by the RFQ. AR, Tab 7, Encentric's Quotation, at 22. As such, we find no basis upon which to conclude that the agency's assignment of a weakness in this regard was unreasonable.

Encentric also challenges the second weakness assigned to its quotation under the personnel factor. In this regard, the agency determined that Encentric failed to demonstrate that its proposed senior functional lead met the minimum requirement for at least two years of experience as a PeopleSoft lead analyst. In raising this challenge, the protester makes the identical argument discussed at length above. According to the protester, had the agency read the resume for the proposed senior functional lead more carefully, it would have been able to discern that the candidate had the requisite experience. Comments at 9. As discussed above, we disagree with the notion that an agency should be required to cobble together and draw broad inferences from the information provided in a resume in order to conclude that the requirements of the RFQ were met. Here, the protester simply failed once

more to submit an adequately written quotation, and we have no basis to conclude that the agency's assignment of a weakness was unreasonable.

In addition to its challenge to the specific assigned weaknesses, Encentric challenges the marginal rating assigned to its quotation under the personnel factor. The solicitation defines a rating of marginal as "[f]ails to meet evaluation standards; however, any significant deficiencies are correctable." RFQ at 49. Here, consistent with the definition of marginal provided in the RFQ, Encentric failed to meet the evaluation standards with regard to the experience of its proposed project manager and senior functional lead personnel. To the extent the protester argues that it should have received a higher rating, such an argument is nothing more than a disagreement with the agency's judgment which, without more, does not establish that the evaluation was unreasonable. Consummate Computer Consultants Systems, LLC, supra, at 4.

Management Approach Factor

Encentric also argues that its proposal should have received a rating of excellent, rather than acceptable, under the management approach factor based on its experience on the incumbent contract. In this regard, Encentric generally makes broad arguments that the agency ignored elements of its management approach, and failed to recognize advantages in its quotation based on its performance as the incumbent.⁷ Protest at 12-13. While the protester's arguments are somewhat vague with regard to specific advantages that were allegedly ignored by the agency, Encentric does refer to portions of its quotation in which, for example, it described its experience in the agency's human resources environment and its proven record of success. Id.

The record does not support the protester's argument that the agency failed to recognize strengths in its proposal pertaining to its management approach. The record shows that the TEP identified eight strengths in Encentric's quotation under the management approach factor, including strengths related to Encentric's incumbent status. For example, the TEP assigned strengths to Encentric's quotation under the management approach factor because "Encentric's corporate capabilities and relevant experience are uniquely focused on [DELETED]," and Encentric's team has proven capability in supporting the agency's user base [DELETED]. AR, Tab 8, Consensus Technical Evaluation, at 13.

Further, with regard to the protester's complaint that based on the number of strengths and weaknesses identified in its quotation, the quotation should have

⁷ While Encentric argues that its incumbent status must necessarily make it superior to B&E, the agency notes that B&E is also currently performing as an incumbent on the scope of work identified in the solicitation. AR at 27.

received a rating of excellent under the management approach factor, the number of strengths and weaknesses is not determinative of the rating, based on the definitions of the ratings provided in the RFQ. The RFQ defined an acceptable rating as “[m]eets evaluation standards and any weaknesses are readily correctable.” RFQ at 49. An exceptional rating was defined as “[e]xceeds specified performance or capability in a beneficial way, and has no weaknesses.” Id. While the evaluators identified strengths in Encentric’s quotation, there is no indication in the record that the evaluators believed Encentric’s approach exceeded the specified performance or capability standard in a beneficial way. Thus, we have no basis upon which to conclude that a higher rating was warranted.

Source Selection Decision

The protester also challenges the source selection decision on the basis that the underlying evaluation was flawed. Because we find that the agency’s technical evaluation was reasonable, we need not further consider this argument.

The protest is denied.

Susan A. Poling
General Counsel