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Decision

Matter of: NCI Information Systems, Inc.

File: B-412680; B-412680.2

Date: May 5, 2016

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DIGEST

1. Protest challenging the agency's technical evaluation is denied where the evaluation was reasonable and consistent with the stated evaluation criteria.
 2. Protest challenging the agency's past performance evaluation is denied where the evaluation was reasonable and consistent with the solicitation's stated evaluation criteria.
 3. Protest challenging the agency's best-value determination is denied where the record indicates that the agency reasonably found the offerors' proposals to be equal as to all nonprice factors, including past performance, such that the awardee's lower-priced proposal represented the best value to the agency.
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DECISION

NCI Information Systems, Inc., of Reston, Virginia, protests the award of a contract to the American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE), of Washington, District of Columbia, under request for proposals (RFP) No. HQ0034-16-R-0007, issued by the Department of Defense (DOD), Washington Headquarters Services (WHS), for support services for the Science, Mathematics and Research for Transformation (SMART) Scholarship for Service Program (SMART Program). NCI argues that the agency's evaluation of its proposal and the resulting award decision were improper.

We deny the protest.

BACKGROUND

The SMART Program provides undergraduate and graduate students pursuing degrees in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) disciplines with scholarships as well as post-graduate employment opportunities, in an effort to increase the number of civilian scientists and engineers working for DOD. Performance Work Statement (PWS) § 1.0. The SMART Program essentially provides educational assistance to individuals in STEM fields in exchange for an obligation that the recipients then work at key DOD laboratories and engineering facilities. Id.

The RFP, issued on October 30, 2015,¹ contemplated the award of a hybrid contract for a base year with four 1-year options.² In general terms, the PWS required the contractor to provide the personnel, facilities, equipment, and other resources necessary to provide all required SMART Program services, including promoting the program, recruiting applicants, collecting application materials, evaluating applicants, administering and disbursing the scholarships, and tracking recipients.³ PWS § 2.0. The solicitation also established that contract award would be made on a best-value basis, based on four evaluation factors: technical approach; past performance; staffing plan; and price.⁴ RFP § M.2. The nonprice price factors were in descending order of importance and, when combined, were more important than price. Id.

Three offerors, including ASEE and NCI, submitted proposals by the November 16 closing date. An agency technical evaluation board (TEB) evaluated offerors' nonprice proposals using various adjectival rating schemes that were set forth in the RFP: outstanding, good, acceptable, marginal, and unacceptable for the technical

¹ The RFP was subsequently amended once. Unless stated otherwise, all references are to the final version of the solicitation.

² The contract line item number (CLIN) for the SMART Program support services was fixed-price in nature. The remaining CLINs (i.e., student tuition payments, contractor travel, contractor advertising) were cost-reimbursement in nature, and the RFP provided offerors with "plug" numbers (\$20,000,000, \$176,000, and \$50,000, respectively) to be used for proposal purposes. RFP at 2-8, 59.

³ As detailed below, the SMART Program support services set forth in the PWS here were previously performed partially by ASEE and NCI, under separate contracts.

⁴ Although the RFP contemplated the award of a hybrid contract involving both fixed-price and cost-reimbursement CLINs, the solicitation referred to the evaluation factor here as "price." RFP at 60. For the sake of consistency with the underlying materials, we also refer to the last evaluation factor as "price."

approach and staffing plan factors; and substantial confidence, satisfactory confidence, limited confidence, no confidence, and unknown confidence/neutral for the past performance factor.⁵ Id. Offerors' prices were not rated, but were separately evaluated for reasonableness and balance by the contracting officer.

On December 18 the TEB completed its evaluation of offerors' proposals, with the final evaluation ratings and prices of the ASEE and NCI proposals as follows:

	ASEE	NCI
Technical Approach	Good	Good
Past Performance	Satisfactory Confidence	Satisfactory Confidence
Staffing Plan	Good	Good
Price	\$122,658,528	\$126,280,475

Agency Report (AR), Tab 6, TEB Report, at 8-23; Tab 7, Source Selection Decision, at 15.

The agency evaluators also identified various strengths and weaknesses in the offerors' proposals, in support of the adjectival ratings assigned. For example, the TEB found two strengths and no weaknesses in NCI's technical approach; one strength and one weakness in NCI's staffing plan; three strengths and one weakness in ASEE's technical approach; and one strength and no weaknesses in ASEE's staffing plan.⁶ Id., Tab 6, TEB Report, at 8-22.

The contracting officer as the source selection authority (SSA) subsequently reviewed the ratings and findings of the agency evaluators. AR, Tab 7, Source Selection Decision, at 1-15. The SSA found the nonprice proposals of ASEE and NCI to be equally ranked, such that price was the determining factor. Id. at 16. The SSA concluded that because ASEE was lower-priced among technically-equal offerors, ASEE's proposal represented the best value to the government. Id. The WHS thereafter made award to ASEE on January 14.

⁵ The RFP also established ratings for assessing the relevance (very relevant, relevant, somewhat relevant, and not relevant) and the quality (outstanding, excellent, adequate, marginal, and not observed) of each offeror's past performance references. RFP § M.4.

⁶ The agency did not assign strengths and weaknesses to offerors' past performance, but did develop narrative findings regarding the relevance and quality of each reference, in support of the overall confidence ratings assigned.

On January 25, after the agency provided NCI with notice of contract award and a debriefing, NCI filed its protest with our Office.

DISCUSSION

NCI's protest raises numerous issues regarding the agency's evaluation and resulting award decision. The protester alleges that the agency's evaluation of its proposal under the technical approach and staffing plan factors was improper. NCI also contends the agency's evaluation of its past performance was unreasonable. Lastly, the protester argues that the agency's best-value determination was improper and failed to recognize NCI's alleged superiority under all nonprice factors. We have considered all the issues and arguments raised by NCI and, although we do not address them all, find they provide no basis on which to sustain the protest.⁷

Technical Approach and Staffing Plan Evaluation of NCI

NCI protests the agency's evaluation of its proposal under the technical approach and staffing plan factors. Specifically, the protester alleges the agency improperly failed to identify additional strengths in NCI's proposal in these areas, and unreasonably identified a weakness in the offeror's staffing plan. NCI contends that it was prejudiced by the agency's evaluation errors, and that it should have been rated as outstanding under both the technical approach and staffing plan factors.

In reviewing a protest challenging the agency's evaluation of proposals, our Office will not reevaluate proposals nor substitute our judgment for that of the agency, as the evaluation of proposals is generally a matter within the agency's discretion. Del-Jen Educ. & Training Group/Fluor Fed. Solutions LLC, B-406897.3, May 28, 2014, 2014 CPD ¶ 166 at 8. Rather, we will review the record to determine whether the agency's evaluation was reasonable; consistent with the stated evaluation criteria, applicable procurement statutes, and regulations; and adequately documented. Shumaker Trucking & Excavating Contractors, Inc., B-290732, Sept. 25, 2002, 2002 CPD ¶ 169 at 3. An offeror's disagreement with an agency's judgment is insufficient to establish that the agency acted unreasonably. Birdwell Bros. Painting & Refinishing, B-285035, July 5, 2000, 2000 CPD ¶ 129 at 5.

For example, NCI argues that agency evaluators improperly failed to assign a strength to the protester's technical proposal for its proposed use of a web-based, submission management system to automate applications for grants, fellowship, scholarships, and awards, called [DELETED]. Protest at 13-15; see AR, Tab 5, NCI Proposal, Vol. II, Technical Approach, at 1. In NCI's view, its proposed use of [DELETED] warranted a strength because the system significantly exceeded the

⁷ In resolving this protest, GAO conducted a 1-day hearing to receive testimony from various agency officials involved in this procurement.

PWS requirements for a fully operational website and database. The agency was aware that NCI had proposed [DELETED] as its submission management system, but found NCI's use of [DELETED] merely met the PWS requirements; there was nothing in NCI's proposal that indicated that [DELETED] exceeded requirements. Contracting Officer's Statement, Feb. 26, 2016, at 2. Similarly, the screenshots which NCI submitted with its proposal to demonstrate an operational website and database also did not indicate anything unique or significantly exceeding the PWS requirements. Id. Thus, we find the agency's evaluation to be reasonable in this regard.

As another example, NCI asserts the agency improperly failed to assign a strength to its technical proposal for the protester's familiarity with the SMART Program lifecycle. Protest at 17-18. The TEB, however, did assign a strength to NCI for proposing to "utilize current and established SMART processes and practices of the application, selection, award, orientation, degree pursuit, internship, and hiring processes" to meet PWS requirements. AR, Tab 6, TEB Report, at 9. The TEB also found, as a strength, that NCI had demonstrated a complete comprehension of the SMART lifecycle and issues. Id. We therefore find no merit in NCI's assertion that the agency failed to properly recognize NCI's familiarity with the SMART Program requirements.

NCI also challenges the agency's evaluation of its proposal under the staffing plan factor. The RFP established that WHS would evaluate an offeror's staffing plan to ensure that it adequately provided support for the PWS tasks, and that the key personnel were suitable for the proposed positions based on, among other things, the individuals' experience and qualifications.⁸ RFP § M.3.3. The TEB identified one strength and one weakness in NCI's staffing plan, and assigned an overall "good" rating.⁹ Specifically, the agency evaluators found that NCI had proposed a web developer with additional experience with database design, which exceeded PWS requirements. AR, Tab 6, TEB Report, at 14. However, the TEB also found as a weakness that while NCI had proposed [DELETED] to provide "out-of-the-box," customizable web pages/web forms that leverages an underlying MySQL database to become a knowledge platform that supports . . . all phases of the SMART lifecycle," AR, Tab 5, NCI Proposal, Vol. II, Technical Approach, at 7, NCI's staffing

⁸ The RFP also established desired experience levels, and educational degree requirements, for the various key personnel positions (i.e., project manager, senior specialist, web developer/manager, database developer/manager). RFP amend. 001, at 24.

⁹ A "good" rating was defined as "[p]roposal meets requirements and indicates a thorough approach and understanding of the requirements. Proposal contains strengths which outweigh any weaknesses. Risk of unsuccessful performance is low." RFP § M.4.1.

plan proposed a database developer with no listed experience in MySQL.¹⁰ Id., Tab 6, TEB Report, at 14.

Although NCI alleges the agency should have identified additional strengths, and erred in assigning the aforementioned weakness, we find the evaluation of NCI's staffing plan to be reasonable.

For example, NCI argues the TEB improperly failed to assign a strength for its key personnel that significantly exceeded the RFP requirements. Our review of the record, however, indicates the agency reasonably found that NCI's key personnel generally met--rather than exceeded--desired qualifications. See Contracting Officer's Statement, Feb. 26, 2016, at 4-5. For example, NCI's proposed project manager had almost 10 years of project management experience, in comparison to the RFP's desired "10+ years of experience." RFP amend. 001, at 24; AR, Tab 5, NCI Technical Proposal, Vol. II, Staffing Plan, at 5. Similarly, while NCI's senior specialist exceeded the RFP's degree requirement, the proposed individual did not possess the desired "8+ years of experience in managing educational program[s] for Science and Technology."¹¹ RFP amend. 001, at 24; AR, Tab 5, NCI Proposal, Vol. II, Staffing Plan, at 6. In sum, we find that NCI's staffing generally met the solicitation requirements, and did not (beyond that already recognized) significantly exceed the requirements as the protester suggests.

NCI also alleges that the assigned staffing plan weakness was in error because the agency evaluators misunderstood NCI's proposal. The protester essentially argues that because its proposed [DELETED] system internally manages the MySQL database, NCI's database developer did not need to have MySQL experience. Protest at 23. We note, however, that the explanation advanced by NCI in its protest as to why its database developer did not need to have MySQL experience was not also present in its proposal. It is an offeror's responsibility to submit a well-written proposal, with adequately detailed information that clearly demonstrates compliance with the solicitation and allows a meaningful review by the procuring agency. See Jacobs Tech., Inc., B-411784, B-411784.2, Oct. 21, 2015, 2015 CPD ¶ 342 at 8; ACC Constr.-McKnight JV, LLC, B-411073, Apr. 30, 2015, 2015 CPD ¶ 147 at 5. An offeror runs the risk that a procuring agency will evaluate its proposal unfavorably where it fails to do so. See Jacobs Tech., Inc., supra; ACC

¹⁰ MySQL is an open source, relational database management system that uses structured query language (SQL); SQL is a language for adding, accessing, and managing content in a database.

¹¹ NCI argues that its proposed web developer also exceeded minimum experience requirements, Protest at 21, but fails to acknowledge that the TEB did in fact assign a strength to the proposal for NCI's use of this individual. See AR, Tab 6, TEB Report, at 14.

Constr.-McKnight JV, LLC, supra. On the record here, we see no basis to question the TEB's finding that NCI's database developer lacked necessary experience to meet the PWS's database requirements.

Past Performance Evaluation of NCI

NCI alleges that the agency's evaluation of its past performance was improper. Specifically, the protester maintains that based on the relevance and quality of the past performance references it submitted, NCI should have received a "substantial confidence" rating.

Our Office will examine an agency's evaluation of an offeror's past performance only to ensure that it was reasonable and consistent with the stated evaluation criteria and applicable statutes and regulations, since determining the relative merit or relative relevance of an offeror's past performance is primarily a matter within the agency's discretion. Richen Mgmt., LLC, B-409697, July 11, 2014, 2014 CPD ¶ 211 at 4. A protester's disagreement with the agency's judgment does not establish that an evaluation was improper. AT&T Corp., B-299542.3, B-299542.4, Nov. 16, 2007, 2008 CPD ¶ 65 at 19. Our review of the record leads us to conclude that the agency's past performance evaluation provides no basis on which to sustain the protest, as detailed below.

The RFP instructed offerors to submit up to three past performance references, and established that the agency would evaluate both the relevance and quality of each reference when determining the overall performance confidence assessment. RFP §§ L.3.2, M.4.2. Also, relevant to the protest here, the RFP stated as follows:

In order to be considered relevant, the offeror must have completed a full cycle of work on this action. This means that the offeror must have received applicants, selected applicants (or selected on behalf of the supervising entity), awarded the scholarship, and received grades from scholarship recipients to ensure compliance with the terms of the scholarship. An offeror will be considered more highly relevant if that offeror has additional experience in orientation and job placement.

Id. § M.4.2.

As stated above, the SMART Program support services were previously performed partially by both ASEE and NCI, under separate contracts. Specifically, under its prior contract with WHS, ASEE had hosted and managed the SMART Program website (including portals for applications, evaluations, and selections); assisted the agency in recruiting evaluators from DOD laboratories and academic institutions for evaluation panels; assisted with the evaluation process; disbursed tuition and stipends to students; maintained a repository of SMART data and documentation; and provided advertising and marketing of the SMART Program externally.

Contracting Officer's Statement, Feb. 26, 2016, at 1. By contrast, under its prior contract with WHS, NCI has marketed the SMART Program to DOD laboratories; worked with DOD laboratories to identify future employment openings; managed support from specific DOD laboratories during the selection process; coordinated work in the laboratories during academic-year breaks; coordinated with SMART participants on issues and reporting; collected and checked grades and post-graduate employment data for compliance; input documents into the SMART Program database; and worked with DOD on collection efforts. Id.

NCI identified two past performance references: its work on the SMART Program from 2014-2015, and its work on the SMART Program from 2009-2014. AR, Tab 5, NCI Proposal, Vol. II, Past Performance, at 4. The TEB found NCI's references to be somewhat relevant, insofar as the work previously performed involved "some of the magnitude of effort and complexities" that the PWS here required.¹² AR, Tab 6, TEB Report, at 10-11. Further, the agency evaluators found the overall quality of NCI's work on both references to be excellent. Id. Based on these relevance and quality determinations, the TEB concluded that NCI's past performance warranted a satisfactory confidence rating, i.e., that the government had an expectation that the offeror would successfully perform the required effort. Id. at 13.

NCI does not dispute the "somewhat relevant" assessment assigned to its two past performance references. See NCI Comments at 6 n.1. Nonetheless, the protester argues that a substantial confidence rating was merited based on the "high standard of success" on its prior work. Id. at 7. The agency contends that because it was required to consider both the relevance and quality of NCI's past performance references, the resulting satisfactory confidence rating was reasonable. We agree.

As set forth above, the RFP established that both the relevance and quality of an offeror's references would be considered when determining the performance confidence assessment. Further, the agency reasonably found NCI's two SMART Program references to be only somewhat relevant, because each involved only some of the scope and complexity of the PWS requirements here. The TEB also found that neither NCI reference involved the completion of a full lifecycle of SMART Program work, which was expressly required by the RFP in order to receive a higher, relevant rating. The protester essentially argues that the agency should have concentrated only on the high standard of success that NCI achieved on prior

¹² The agency evaluators found "[t]he tasks of Evaluation Panel, Selection, Awards, and the oversight of SMART participants through scholarship lifecycle are similar to tasks 3.3.1, 3.3.2, 3.4 and 3.6.1 in the PWS. The previous work also was in support of orientation and hiring similar to tasks 3.5 and 3.7 in the PWS." AR, Tab 6, TEB Report, at 10. However, the TEB also found that "[w]hile the work performed [by NCI] supported the application and selection process, it did not include receiving and selecting applicants" Id.

SMART contracts, and ignored the fact that neither reference involved performing all the work requirements of the PWS. We find that rating the protester as it suggests would have been inconsistent with the solicitation. Instead, since the agency reasonably evaluated both the relevance and quality of NCI's prior efforts--neither aspect of which the protester disagrees--we find the resulting satisfactory confidence assessment was also reasonable.

Best-Value Determination

NCI also protests the agency's best-value determination. Specifically, the protester argues that the agency failed to recognize and account for the superiority of NCI's proposal in all nonprice areas, including past performance, vis-à-vis ASEE. NCI also alleges the agency's determination of technical equivalency between ASEE and NCI was improperly based solely on the adjectival ratings assigned, despite recognized differences between the offerors' technical proposals. The protester contends that had the agency properly looked behind the assigned adjectival ratings, and performed a reasonable price/technical tradeoff analysis, then contract award would have been made to NCI.

Where, as here, a solicitation provides for award on a best-value basis, it is the function of the source selection authority to perform (if necessary) price/technical tradeoffs, that is, to determine whether one proposal's technical superiority is worth the higher price, and the extent to which one is sacrificed for the other is governed only by the test of rationality and consistency with the stated evaluation criteria.¹³ General Dynamics Land Sys., B-412525, B-412525.2, Mar. 15, 2016, 2016 CPD ¶ 89 at 11; Savvee Consulting, Inc., B-408416.3, Mar. 5, 2014, 2014 CPD ¶ 92 at 7. Moreover, as a general matter, adjectival ratings are but a guide to, and not a substitute for, intelligent decision-making. Science Applications Int'l Corp., B-407105, B-407105.2, Nov. 1, 2012, 2012 CPD ¶ 310 at 7; TPL, Inc., B-297136.10, B-297136.11, June 29, 2006, 2006 CPD ¶ 104 at 17. A protester's disagreement with an agency's judgments about the relative merit of competing proposals does not establish that the evaluation was unreasonable. General Dynamics Land Sys., *supra*.

After the TEB completed its evaluation, the SSA accepted the evaluators' ratings of NCI and ASEE with regard to the technical approach and staffing plan factors, as well as those regarding NCI's past performance. AR, Tab 7, Source Selection Decision, at 11-14. Regarding ASEE's past performance, however, the SSA also took into account additional performance information of which he was personally

¹³ The fact that no price/technical tradeoff is required between proposals found to be technically equal does not negate the fact that the agency made award on a best-value basis. Lynxnet, LLC, B-409791, B-409791.2, Aug. 4, 2014, 2014 CPD ¶ 233 at 13-14.

aware. Specifically, the TEB's evaluation of ASEE's past performance was based only on the three references that ASEE identified in its proposal: (1) the National Defense Science and Engineering Graduate Fellowship Program; (2) the Naval Research Enterprise Internship Program & Science and Engineering Apprenticeship Program; and (3) the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship Program. AR, Tab 4, ASEE Proposal, Vol. II, Past Performance, at 16-21. The TEB found the first two references to be somewhat relevant and having adequate quality, and the third reference to be somewhat relevant and having excellent quality. AR, Tab 6, TEB Report, at 18-20.

The SSA was also aware that ASEE was one of the incumbent SMART Program contractors but noted that the company had not identified its incumbent contract as a past performance reference.¹⁴ AR, Tab 7, Source Selection Decision, at 15. The SSA considered ASEE's performance on the SMART Program to be of satisfactory, or adequate, quality (*i.e.*, ASEE met stated requirements on a routine basis). *Id.* at 15; Hearing Transcript (Tr.) at 126, 129-30. The SSA also considered ASEE's work on the SMART Program to be relevant.¹⁵ Tr. at 128-29. The SSA concluded that "[b]ased on the past performance information available to the Government, both provided by ASEE and information about past performance that the Government has close at hand, the Government determines that there is 'satisfactory confidence' that ASEE will successfully perform this requirement." AR, Tab 7, Source Selection Decision, at 15.

The SSA thereafter performed his best-value determination. The SSA found that with regard to the technical capability and staffing plan factors, while "both NCI and ASEE have strengths and weaknesses in different areas, the Government determines that they are fundamentally equal on both these factors." *Id.* at 16. In his source selection decision, however, the SSA did not explain how he determined NCI and ASEE to be also equal as to past performance.

At the hearing held by our Office, the SSA explained that he considered the past performance of ASEE and NCI to be essentially equal, because although the quality of NCI's past performance was superior, ASEE's past performance was of greater relevance: "NCI does . . . fewer things, but they do them well. ASEE does more things, but they do them acceptable." Tr. at 132; see also *id.* at 131, 157. The SSA

¹⁴ In fact the SSA, as contracting officer, had prepared the Contractor Performance Assessment Reporting System (CPARS) report regarding ASEE's performance on the SMART Program. AR, Tab 11, ASEE CPARS, at 1-4.

¹⁵ Likewise, although not taken into account when performing its evaluation, the TEB also believed ASEE's performance on the SMART Program to be relevant (ASEE had completed a full cycle of work) and of adequate quality. Tr. at 41, 48, 55.

also detailed how, in relation to the PWS here, ASEE had previously performed more of the required SMART Program tasks than had NCI.¹⁶ Id. at 140-59. The SSA was also of the opinion that the relevance of an offeror's prior work was more important than quality when assessing the confidence of future performance. Id. at 141-42. The SSA concluded that he had found the past performance of ASEE and NCI to be essentially the same not because the offerors had the same rating, but because of what had led to those ratings--findings regarding the scope and quality of the work previously performed.¹⁷ Id. at 133-35.

NCI argues that the SSA failed to contemporaneously document his conclusion regarding the equivalence of the offerors' past performance, and that we should afford little or no weight to the SSA's testimony regarding this matter. We disagree.

Our Office generally considers post-protest explanations where the explanations merely provide a detailed rationale for contemporaneous conclusions and fill in previously unrecorded details, so long as the explanations are credible and consistent with the contemporaneous record. See Vinculum Solutions, Inc.-Recon., B-408337.3, Dec. 3, 2013, 2013 CPD ¶ 274 at 3 n.2; NCI Info. Sys., Inc., B-405589, Nov. 23, 2011, 2011 CPD ¶ 269 at 4 n.3. In contrast, our Office accords lesser weight to post-hoc arguments or analyses made in response to protest allegations because we are concerned that new judgments made in the heat of an adversarial process may not represent the fair and considered judgment of the agency. Boeing Sikorsky Aircraft Support, B-277263.2, B-277263.3, Sept. 29, 1997, 97-2 CPD ¶ 91 at 15.

We find that the record here does not reflect judgments or decisions that were made after award in response to the protest, or that are otherwise non-contemporaneous, post-hoc explanations; rather, we find the SSA's testimony to be both credible and consistent with the contemporaneous record. For example, the SSA's conclusion that ASEE's past performance was more relevant than NCI's is consistent with the contemporaneous documents such as the source selection decision and consolidation memorandum. The SSA's conclusion is also supported by his "crosswalk" of the SMART Program PWS requirements here to the work previously performed by each offeror. In sum, we find that as part of his best-value determination, the SSA reasonably considered the past performance of ASEE and

¹⁶ The SSA also referred to both his source selection decision and SMART Program consolidation memorandum in support of the conclusion that ASEE had previously performed more of the PWS requirements than had NCI. Tr. at 135, 151.

¹⁷ Having determined the proposals of ASEE and NCI to be equal under all nonprice factors, the SSA then determined that ASEE's lower-priced proposal represented the best value to the government. AR, Tab 7, Source Selection Decision, at 16.

NCI to be essentially equal for reasons beyond that the offerors had common evaluation ratings.¹⁸

The protest is denied.

Susan A. Poling
General Counsel

¹⁸ Lastly, we find no merit to the protester's assertion that the SSA's award decision was made without sufficient knowledge about the performance problems ASEE had on its submitted references. The record reflects that the TEB reasonably assessed the quality of ASEE's work on its prior contracts, including the past performance questionnaires to which NCI refers here. See AR, Tab 6, TEB Report, at 18-20. The TEB found that notwithstanding the cited problems, the overall quality of ASEE's performance was excellent on one reference and adequate on the other two references. Id. While NCI now highlights the identified shortcomings in ASEE's past performance references, it has failed to show that the assigned quality ratings were in fact improper. The SSA then reasonably relied on the TEB's findings regarding ASEE's past performance references, as well as his personal knowledge of ASEE's performance on the incumbent SMART Program contract, when making his best-value determination. In sum, as NCI has not shown the past performance evaluation of ASEE on which the SSA relied was unreasonable, we find the SSA was not required to personally review the underlying source documentation in order to make a valid award decision.