



United States General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

Decision

Matter of: Joseph W. Beausoleil

File: B-285643

Date: August 31, 2000

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DIGEST

In evaluating applications submitted in response to a solicitation for a personal services contract, agency properly considered the relevance of the applicants' work experience to the contract requirements during the evaluation of applications under the work experience criterion.

DECISION

Joseph W. Beausoleil protests the award of a personal services contract under solicitation No. 675-00-005, issued by the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) for a monitoring and evaluation specialist in Conakry, Guinea.¹ Mr. Beausoleil argues that the agency's evaluation of his and the awardee's applications was unreasonable and inconsistent with the solicitation's evaluation criteria.

We deny the protest.

The solicitation, issued January 11, 2000, included a background section explaining that the overall program goal for AID in Guinea is to achieve "improved economic and social well being of all Guineans in a participatory society." AID has established

¹ Our Office has jurisdiction over this protest as it concerns a contract for the procurement of services. See 31 U.S.C. §§ 3551(1), 3552 (1994 & Supp. IV 1998); Federal Acquisition Regulation § 37.104; Mary Jo McDonough, B-270530, B-270530.2, Mar. 13, 1996, 96-1 CPD ¶ 154 at 2 n.2.

four program objectives aimed at achieving this goal, such as “increased use of sustainable natural resource management practices.” The solicitation explained that a mission team will be assigned to each objective and will be responsible for implementing activities to achieve the assigned objective. The solicitation stated with regard to the need for a monitoring and evaluation specialist that monitoring and evaluation of the programs are vital to, among other things, “ensure that the intended impacts of the activities and the program are being achieved.” Solicitation § A.

The solicitation provided for the award of a personal services contract for a base period of 2 years with one 1-year option, and included a detailed description of the tasks (both specific and general) to be performed by the successful monitoring and evaluation specialist. For example, the successful applicant will “[h]ave broad responsibility for the design and implementation of the monitoring and evaluation systems,” and will “[w]ork with the teams to ensure that the indicators in the Performance Monitoring Plans accurately measure the desired results, that the data are available and collected by the responsible party, and that on-going monitoring takes place.” Solicitation §§ C, D.

The solicitation also set forth the qualifications desired of candidates and the information to be included in the applications. The solicitation informed candidates that their applications would be evaluated under the following criteria: education (25 percent); work experience (60 percent); and French language capabilities (15 percent). Solicitation § G.

The agency received applications from 18 individuals, and selected 3 applications, including those submitted by the protester and the awardee, for “detailed consideration” by an evaluation committee. Agency Report at 4. The applications were evaluated individually by each committee member and an overall composite score was calculated for each applicant. Agency Report, Tab L, Memorandum of Selection Committee, at 1. The awardee’s application received a composite score of 388 out of 500 points, the application of a second individual received 343 points, and the protester’s application received 322 points. The agency concluded that the awardee was the strongest of the candidates based upon the applications submitted and selected her for the position. Id. at 5.

The protester argues that the agency failed to evaluate his and the awardee’s applications reasonably and in accordance with the “work experience” criterion set forth in the solicitation.

The work experience evaluation criterion was set forth in the solicitation as follows:

--At least 5 years of demonstrated experience in monitoring and evaluating performance and impact of development projects or programs with increasing responsibility in developing countries.

--Experience managing donors funded development assistance programs in a francophone country is also desirable.

The record of the evaluation consists primarily of the worksheets completed by each of the five members of the selection committee, and the memorandum prepared by the chairman of the committee. The awardee's application received scores of 43, 50, 50, 40, and 50 points under the work experience criterion, for an average score of 46.6 points and a composite score of 233 points. Mr. Beausoleil's application received scores of 28, 37, 50, 20 and 35 points under the work experience criterion, for an average score of 34 points and a composite score of 170 points. Agency Report, Tab L, Memorandum of Selection Committee, at 1. The committee found, based upon the awardee's application, that, among other things, her work experience was "strongly relevant to the requirement contained in the position description," given that for the past 3 years she had worked in and managed a monitoring and evaluation unit in an AID Mission in Haiti that was "geared to the planning for and collection and interpretation of performance data." Id. at 3-4. The committee also noted that the awardee's experience included working as a monitoring and evaluation officer for UNICEF from 1992 through 1995. Id.

With regard to the protester, the committee found that, while Mr. Beausoleil has "strong skills in program management" and "in managing performance-based contracts," he lacked monitoring and evaluation specialist "experience in developing countries in a donor-funded development assistance program" and in providing monitoring and evaluation training in francophone countries. Id. at 2, 4.

In challenging the agency's evaluation, the protester contends that, during the evaluation of applications under the work experience criterion, the selection committee members improperly considered the agency's needs, as set forth in the solicitation's description of the tasks (both specific and general) to be performed, in rating the applications. For example, the protester points out that one committee member noted in evaluating the protester's application that, "[w]ith respect to the specific kind of hands on field experience required of the position, the candidate is lacking in the required skills." Protester's Comments at 3. The protester concludes here that this committee member "appears to have evaluated me not against the work experience factor as expressed in the solicitation but against the position description of the [monitoring and evaluation] specialist found in the solicitation." Id. As a second example, the protester points out that another committee member, in assigning a score of 20 out of 60 points under the work experience evaluation criterion, commented that "there is little evidence of experience in the kind of [monitoring and evaluation] that we are looking for." Id. at 5.

Much of the protester's challenge to the agency's evaluation of his and the awardee's applications results from the protester's misunderstanding of the solicitation. That is, the protester in essence argues that it was improper for the agency, in evaluating applications under the work experience criterion, to consider in any manner the relevance of the applicants' work experience to the tasks to be performed under this

contract. In our view, the protester construes the evaluation section of the solicitation unreasonably narrowly, interpreting it as if it stands alone without the rest of the solicitation to complement it. The solicitation should be read and interpreted as a whole, and therefore, the section of the solicitation that describes the tasks to be performed by the successful applicant and the solicitation's evaluation criteria should be read together as a description of the agency's requirements and how it would evaluate the applications submitted. See Recon Optical, B-232125, Dec. 1, 1988, 88-2 CPD ¶ 544 at 8-9. Accordingly, there was nothing improper in the committee members' consideration of the relevance of the applicants' experience to the work that will be performed under this solicitation in scoring applications under the work experience criterion.

The protester also complains that the committee acted unreasonably in concluding that the protester lacked monitoring and evaluation specialist experience. In this regard, the protester points to a number of positions he has held, such as a foreign service officer for AID in Guinea-Bissau, Egypt, and Ecuador. According to the protester's application, as a foreign service officer he "applied monitoring and evaluation skills to measure results and used the findings to redesign projects or reprogram resources." Agency Report, Tab F, Beausoleil Application, attach. A; see Protester's Comments at 3-5. The protester also points out that from 1975 to 1980 he served as a supervisory evaluation specialist for ACTION, during which time he, among other things, "[d]esigned a system for evaluating Peace Corps country programs." Beausoleil Application, attach. A; see Protester's Comments at 5.

With regard to the agency's evaluation of the awardee's application under the work experience criterion, the protester contends that "[a] reasonable assessment of the selected candidate's work experience based upon the comments found in the selected candidate's score sheets would be that she did not meet the required work experience sub-factor." Protester's Supplemental Comments at 3. The protester here points out that certain members of the selection committee noted that the awardee "lack[s a] theoretical background," and that her application is "weak in communicating what she has done." Protester's Supplemental Comments at 2, 4; Agency Report, Tab I, Committee Member Worksheets. The protester adds that the awardee's scores under the work experience evaluation criterion were unreasonably high as the result of the selection committee having "changed the description of the kind of work experience to 'hands-on' [monitoring and evaluation] experience." Protester's Supplemental Comments at 3.

As the protester's complaints indicate, the agency found that the awardee's work experience, which included direct experience as a monitoring and evaluation specialist officer and coordinator, should be evaluated more favorably than the protester's work experience, which consisted primarily of his experience as a foreign service officer during which his management of certain programs required the use of monitoring and evaluation techniques. In our view, the agency's assignment of a higher score to the awardee's application than the protester's based upon its view, which is supported by the record, that the awardee's work experience was more

relevant to the position being solicited here, was neither inconsistent with the work experience criterion nor unreasonable.

The committee member's comment that the awardee's application is "weak in communicating what she has done" does not appear significant when the record is considered as a whole or when considered in light of the work experience criterion. In any event, the protester has not explained why this committee member's scoring of the awardee's proposal as 43 out of 60 points was unreasonable, given that the only weaknesses noted on this committee member's worksheets relate to how that work experience was described in the awardee's application, and not to the awardee's actual work experience. Similarly, the protester has not explained why the scoring of the awardee's application as 50 out of 60 points under the work experience criterion by the committee member who found that the awardee "lack[s a] theoretical background" was unreasonable, given that this comment was the only weakness identified by that member.

The protester also points out that one committee member commented that the awardee "does not have the 5 years experience in monitoring and evaluation," and contends, based primarily on this comment, that the awardee's application should have been rejected. Comments at 8; Supplemental Comments at 3. The agency responds that the committee member's statement that the awardee lacked the requisite 5 years of monitoring and evaluation experience is "inconsistent with [the awardee's] qualifications and experience," and that, in its view, the committee member should have evaluated the awardee's application more favorably with a higher score. Supplemental Report at 3 n.4. Based on our review, we agree with the agency that this committee member's statement that the awardee does not have the requisite 5 years experience cannot be reconciled with the record here, including the awardee's application, the views of the other four committee members, and the committee as a whole as reflected in the committee's memorandum recommending that the awardee be selected for the position.

Based on our review, we find reasonable the agency's evaluation of the applications under the work experience evaluation criterion and the agency's award selection.

The protest is denied.

Robert P. Murphy
General Counsel