

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

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FILE: B-182994

DATE: June 16, 1975

97185

MATTER OF: JCL Services, Inc.

DIGEST:

Firm submitting low quote for cleaning of exhaust ducts was not entitled to award of contract where contracting officer suspected error in quote and made good faith efforts but failed to contact firm for verification. Request for quotation was merely for informational or planning purposes and Government is not bound under ASPR 3-604.2 to contract with party offering lowest quote and may give consideration to administrative costs of effecting contract.

A request for quotations, Standard Form 18, for cleaning of exhaust hoods and ducts at eight buildings located at Kincheloe Air Force Base, Michigan, was issued to six firms on December 5, 1974. On December 18, 1974, four quotations were received and opened. JCL was low with a quote of \$1,712, which was \$264, or approximately 15 percent, lower than the \$1,976 Government estimate and \$202 lower than the next low quote of \$1,944.

The Air Force reports that the contracting officer suspected an error in JCL's quotation. The work site (Kincheloe Air Force Base) was a considerable distance from the protester's business address (Torrance, California) and there was a sizeable variance between JCL's quotation, the Government estimate and the other quotations, including a quotation by a local contractor who would not be required to incur extensive travel costs to perform the contract. Since the Air Force was unsuccessful in contacting JCL to verify its quotation, a contract was entered into with another firm.

JCL states that the Government was without justification in believing that its "bid" may have been in error and it asserts that the Air Force failed to use reasonable efforts in attempting to contact it by telephone for verification. JCL believes the Air Force acted in bad faith in contracting with another firm at a higher price.

As to whether there was sufficient cause to suspect error in JCL's quotation, we believe the agency's precaution was warranted. The Government's estimate was 15 percent higher than JCL's quotation. Moreover, the procuring activity could reasonably expect that JCL would incur transportation expense which would not be required of a local firm whose quotation was more in line with the Government's estimate. In such circumstances, verification is normally required. 37 Comp. Gen. 706, 707 (1958).

Regarding the procuring activity's efforts to reach JCL, the record shows that a prompt award was considered necessary and that the activity made two unsuccessful attempts to reach JCL through the use of the automatic voice network (autovon) of the Department of Defense. In this connection the protester argues that it could have been reached by long distance telephone to the area code and number listed in its quotation. Although this may be the case, it seems that the procuring activity did not know at the time it tried to reach JCL through autovon lines, which required the initiator to call another autovon station in the locality of the party to be called without reference to area code, that the telephone number listed in JCL's quotation was not within its stated location (Torrance, California). Moreover, the present record does not indicate why the area code listed in JCL's quotation did not coincide with the firm's address.

In the circumstances, there is no apparent reason to conclude that the procuring activity should have known to use commercial rather than autovon telephone lines. Moreover, the record shows that the procuring activity subsequently attempted to verify JCL's telephone number with the Torrance, California information operator but was unsuccessful since the firm was not listed in that locality. In our view, this action reflects a further good faith effort to reach JCL.

Furthermore, small purchases which do not exceed \$10,000 may be made by purchase order or other appropriate small purchase negotiated method. 10 U.S.C.A.2304(a)(3) (1975). A request for quotations is merely for informational or planning purposes. See block 10 of Request for Quotations, Standard Form 18. Its purpose is to assure that the procurement is to the advantage of the

Government, price and other factors considered, including the administrative cost of the purchase. Armed Services Procurement Regulation 3-604.2(a). In our opinion no further administrative efforts to reach JCL were required in the circumstances.

Accordingly, the protest is denied.

Deputy Comptroller General
of the United States