

**DECISION**

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

**FILE:** B-218170

**DATE:** May 21, 1985

**MATTER OF:** Systems, Terminals & Communications Corp.

**DIGEST:**

No reasonable basis exists for an aggregate award under an RFP for various line items of peripheral equipment to be used with an existing automatic data processing system. The law's preference for maximum practicable competition mandates multiple awards for individual line items in the absence of a reasonable and supportable reason for an aggregate award.

Systems, Terminals & Communications Corp. (STC) protests request for proposals (RFP) No. FO1600-84-R0112, issued by Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, for various line items of automatic data processing (ADP) peripheral equipment.

The RFP as amended, requests prices for the lease, purchase, and lease/purchase of the following line items: five data processing keyboard visual display units, 10 word processing keyboard visual display units, a remote keyboard visual display unit, two modems, a daisy wheel printer, a dual sheet feeder for the printer and a removal disc drive. The RFP states that a single award will be made. The Air Force has an existing Wang central processing unit and ADP system and the equipment being procured here is required to interface with and be compatible with that system.

STC protests that since the RFP only provides for a single aggregate award, STC is precluded from submitting an acceptable proposal because it can only supply some of the line items. STC argues that multiple awards would result in considerable savings. We sustain the protest in part and deny the remainder.

The decision whether to procure by means of a total package approach, rather than by separate procurements or awards for divisible portions of a requirement, is generally a matter within the discretion of the procurement agency. MASSTOR Systems Corporation, B-211240, Dec. 27, 1983, 84-1 C.P.D. ¶ 23. We will not disturb an agency's decision to procure on a total package basis, or the technical judgment

forming the basis for that decision, absent a clear showing that the determination lacks a reasonable basis. Id.

The only justification for an aggregate award made by the Air Force in this case is:

"b. . . . This request is for an entire system to be leased, maintained, and installed by one contractor. We can ill afford to have divided responsibility among more than one contractor. We must evaluate all components as one system to insure workability with our present system. Since one component can influence the other components within the system, and therefore cause the entire system to be inoperable a multiple award on this request could cause a conflict between separate contractors as to which component has caused any slowdown or stoppage of operation and who's responsibility it is to repair the malfunction. As can be seen, especially with the high importance of this equipment's mission, we cannot be placed in this compromising a position."

We have consistently recognized that the need for compatibility of the components comprising a system may be a legitimate basis for procuring on a system basis with a single contractor, rather than on a component basis with possibly several contractors. MASSTOR Systems Corporation, B-211240, supra.; Interscience System, Inc., Amperif Corporation, B-201943, B-202021, Aug. 31, 1982, 82-2 C.P.D. ¶ 187. On the other hand, we have also held that the law's overriding preference for the maximum practicable competition suggests that procurements should be conducted on a component basis if any needed system compatibility can be reasonably obtained with that approach. Bell & Howell Company, Inc.; Pitney Bowes, Inc., B-213122, et al., May 25, 1984, 84-1 C.P.D. ¶ 573. Consequently, we have sustained protests of solicitations providing only for aggregate awards, as opposed to line item or component awards, where no reasonable or legitimate reason for system compatibility has been shown. Honeywell Information Systems, Inc., B-212224, Oct. 9, 1984, 84-2 C.P.D. ¶ 389. Bell & Howell, B-213122, et al., supra.; Intermem Corporation, B-212964, July 31, 1984, 84-2 C.P.D. ¶ 133.

In the present case, the Air Force is procuring peripheral equipment for an existing Wang ADP system. Contrary to the Air Force justification, our review indicates

that a new single complete system is not being procured here. There is no indication or allegation that the bulk of these line items interface directly with one another to form a separate system in themselves. Further, from our review, we find no indication that the operation of the existing system is dependent on the operation of each of the procured peripheral equipment. The stated Air Force justification that a single contractor is needed to have maintenance responsibility over the entire system to prevent conflicts among the agency contractors is not supported by the record. If a particular piece of peripheral equipment supplied under this procurement does not operate properly when or after it is installed, then either that equipment or the existing system may be the problem. Moreover, there is no attempt to justify a sole-source award for these items to the firm which supplied and/or maintains the existing Wang system so it is clear that multiple maintenance of the system is contemplated in any case.

On the other hand, we note that some of the procured line items apparently do function with each other as subsystems, e.g., the daisy wheel printer and dual feeder to the printer. We would have no objection to appropriate packaging of various line items of this RFP for award purposes to allow for a single source for certain groups of line items to assure subsystem compatibility if it is properly justified.

We sustain the protest.

The closing date for the RFP has been extended indefinitely pending our decision. Absent a reasonable and supportable justification for an aggregate award, we recommend that the solicitation be amended to provide for multiple awards of individual or groups of line items.

STC also protests that the line item descriptions are ambiguous because the RFP schedule does not refer to the specific Wang model numbers that are required. However, the specifications completely describe what is required, so this protest basis has no merit.

STC also protests a paragraph in the specifications referring to eight different Wang terminal devices because it does not know what Wang model to offer. However, this paragraph describes the protocol capabilities that the keyboard video display unit (one of the line items being procured) must possess and is not intended to designate which Wang model is desired. Consequently, we do not find the RFP ambiguous and deny STC's protest on this point.

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Based on the foregoing, STC's protest is sustained in part and the remainder is denied.

for *Milton J. Fowler*  
Comptroller General  
of the United States