



The Comptroller General  
of the United States

Washington, D.C. 20548

## Decision

Matter of: IRT Corporation  
File: B-227963  
Date: October 28, 1987

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### DIGEST

Protest that offeror was improperly excluded from the competitive range is denied where the agency reasonably concluded that the offeror had no reasonable chance of award because its proposal contained major technical weaknesses and scored substantially below the technical proposals of the other two higher-rated offerors.

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### DECISION

IRT Corporation protests the exclusion of its proposal from the competitive range under request for proposals (RFP) No. F33615-87-R-5249, issued by the Air Force Aeronautical Systems Division, Wright Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, for research on the advanced development of Backscatter Imaging Tomography (BIT), used for the inspection of aeronautical and solid rocket motor components. IRT contends that it is better able than any other company to understand the Air Force's requirements, that it has experience on similar systems, and that it can perform in the shortest period of time.

We deny the protest.

The solicitation, issued on April 20, 1987, involved the development of a laboratory model, i.e., data, computer software and design specifications, for a BIT system. This system would allow for the computerized diagnosis of X-ray data where the near-surface regions of very large structures are of primary interest and object size, opacity, construction or access preclude the use of other techniques, as in inspection of large solid rocket motor walls or joints to check for hidden damage.

The RFP stated that the Air Force would select the best overall offer, based on technical merit, cost and other pertinent factors. Technical proposals were to be evaluated on, in descending order of importance, soundness of

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approach, understanding of the problem, special technical requirements, and compliance with requirements, with a total of 14 subfactors. Past performance, as it pertained to prior relevant contracts, was to be considered in the evaluation under each criterion. The criteria for award selection from those proposals determined to be technically acceptable were, in descending order of importance, technical acceptability; reasonableness, realism, and completeness; and management capabilities.

The Air Force received three proposals in response to the solicitation. Two of the three offerors were found acceptable and asked to submit best and final offers. The Air Force determined that IRT's proposal was outside the competitive range because major weaknesses in its proposal were not correctable. On all four technical evaluation criteria, IRT's proposal was rated at the low range of poor, in contrast to the significantly higher ratings of the other two offerors. IRT has protested that determination to our Office. The Air Force has not awarded the contract.

The evaluation of technical proposals and the resulting determination as to whether an offeror is in the competitive range is a matter within the discretion of the contracting agency, since that agency is responsible for defining its needs and the best method of accommodating them. Generally, offers that are technically unacceptable as submitted and would require major revisions to become acceptable are not required to be included in the competitive range. Rice Services, B-218001.2, Apr. 8, 1985, 85-1 C.P.D. ¶ 400. In reviewing an agency's technical evaluation, we will not reevaluate the proposal, but instead will examine the agency's evaluation to ensure that it was not arbitrary or in violation of the procurement laws and regulations. W&J Construction Corp., B-224990, Jan. 6, 1987, 87-1 C.P.D. ¶ 13. We find that the Air Force's technical evaluation of IRT's proposal and exclusion of it from the competitive range were reasonable.

Under the first evaluation criterion, soundness of approach, the RFP required the offeror to present a scientifically sound, systematic approach to achieving the goals of the program: the validation of the BIT technology. The Air Force found that although IRT adequately addressed the methods of quantifying the performance parameters of the instrumentation, definitions of resolution, resolving power and contract sensitivity, it did not address these factors in the required context of examining the example specimens of the RFP. In addition, the Air Force found that the IRT proposal did not examine the methodology for the detection of defects, asserting that the proposed IRT system is a radiation backscatter imaging system but not a radiation

backscatter imaging tomography system. IRT protests that it is proposing an alternate system that does precisely what the Air Force wants, but the Air Force states that by basing its approach on modifications to a highly specialized X-ray inspection system for artillery shells, IRT does not focus on the goal of the RFP: the computerized reconstruction of X-ray data.

We cannot dispute the Air Force's analysis. Our review of the proposal submitted by IRT verifies that IRT, by its own admission, did not propose to validate the feasibility study of the technology supplied by the Air Force. The RFP specifically states that BIT goes beyond conventional computer tomography to use backscattered radiation to reconstruct computed tomography-like images of cross-sectional planes through an object: it combines computer technology with traditional methods of measuring transmission and scattering of X-rays to provide a new form of imaging that results in a quantitative computer-reconstructed map. IRT proposed a different way to accomplish the same goal instead of proposing to supply the software and data requested by the RFP to validate BIT instruments already developed by the Air Force.

The second evaluation criterion, understanding the problem, required the offeror to show familiarity with state-of-the-art X-ray imaging instrumentation and of the technologies associated with complex, multi-layered materials and structures. The Air Force found that IRT failed to demonstrate understanding of the mathematics associated with BIT image reconstruction and the computer codes used, ignoring the BIT reconstruction algorithm description and the reconstructed images presented in the RFP. The Air Force also stated that IRT did not present any evidence to demonstrate the required understanding of multi-layer honeycomb composite design and fabrication. IRT merely disagrees with the Air Force's conclusions as to its mathematical understanding and states that its visual display is identical to a tomographic image but is presented faster and would cost less.

We find the Air Force's evaluation under this criterion to be reasonable. IRT does not present any evidence to support its claim of mathematical understanding, and it is clear from the firm's protest that IRT's approach to image reconstruction and analysis simply is not what the Air Force, through issuing the RFP, was looking for.

The third criterion, special technical requirements, required that offerors demonstrate expertise in new inspection concepts, and propose sufficiently trained personnel with demonstrated expertise in the requisite technical

disciplines. In order to receive a superior rating, the offeror also had to have the capability of manufacturing the aeronautical and aerospace materials and components described in the RFP. The Air Force found that IRT did not propose key personnel with expertise in BIT image reconstruction instrumentation or with experience working with the required materials, and that the expertise of IRT's personnel was production-oriented, rather than research-oriented. IRT claims that it has successfully completed BIT systems that show a complete understanding of the inspection requirements of the RFP and also points to one employee who has experience in writing data reconstruction codes providing three-dimensional images that show defect locations.

We find the Air Force's evaluation of IRT's proposal reasonable as to this criterion. IRT essentially only states that it has successfully completed an inspection system that gives the same results as the system the RFP wants the contractor to validate, and responds to the personnel question by naming only one employee with the requisite experience. In addition, IRT does not have, or propose a subcontractor for, the manufacturing capability necessary to achieve a superior rating.

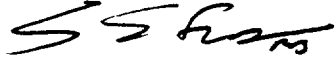
The last criterion, compliance with requirements, required that the offeror describe the line of work, the limits of the proposed work, the computer hardware, the proposed confirmation experiments, and the personnel to be assigned to the project. The Air Force found that IRT's proposal emphasized imaging rather than tomography, and thus, as described above, did not fulfill the requirements of the RFP. IRT replies that it supplied a detailed breakdown by employee classification by task for the program it proposed.

We find the Air Force's evaluation under this criterion to be reasonable. It is axiomatic that an offeror who proposes something different from what is requested has not complied with the requirements of the RFP.

In view of the weaknesses in IRT's proposal and its relative standing with regard to technical score, the Air Force determined that the firm did not have a reasonable chance for an award. We conclude that the Air Force's

determination was reasonable and that IRT's proposal was properly excluded from the competitive range.

The protest is denied.



James F. Hinchman  
General Counsel