



Decision

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Matter of: CACI, Inc.--Federal

File: B-420729.2

Date: March 1, 2023

Robert K. Tompkins, Esq., Gordon Griffin, Esq., Hillary J. Freund, Esq., and Richard Ariel, Esq., Holland & Knight LLP, for the protester.

Scott M. McCaleb, Esq., John R. Prairie, Esq., Jon W. Burd, Esq., J. Ryan Frazee, Esq., and W. Benjamin Phillips, III, Esq., Wiley Rein LLP, for Boeing Intelligence & Analytics, the intervenor.

James E. Durkee, Esq., Max D. Houtz, Esq., William S. Whitman, Esq., and Lieutenant Colonel Jason R. Hull, Defense Intelligence Agency, for the agency.

Heather Self, Esq., and Peter H. Tran, Esq., Office of the General Counsel, GAO, participated in the preparation of the decision.

DIGEST

1. Protest challenging the agency's reevaluation because it was not reconciled with an earlier evaluation is denied because there was no requirement to do so.
2. Protest that the agency unreasonably failed to assign higher adjectival ratings to and assess additional strengths in the protester's proposal is denied because the record reflects the evaluation was reasonable and consistent with the solicitation. The protester's disagreement with the agency's assessment of the merits of the firm's proposal does not provide a basis to sustain the protest.
3. Protest alleging disparate evaluation is denied because the record shows that differences in the evaluation of proposals stemmed from the firms' different offerings.
4. Protest challenging the agency's source selection decision is denied because the record shows the selection was reasonable and consistent with the solicitation's establishment of a highest technically rated, reasonably priced award methodology.

DECISION

CACI, Inc.--Federal, of Chantilly, Virginia, protests the issuance of a task order to Boeing Intelligence & Analytics, of Annapolis Junction, Maryland, under request for proposals (RFP) No. HHM402-21-R-0077, issued by the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) for information technology (IT) services. The protester challenges multiple aspects of the agency's evaluation and source selection process.

We deny the protest.

BACKGROUND

On October 13, 2021, using the procedures of Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) subpart 16.5, the agency issued a task order RFP to holders of its Solutions for the Information Technology Enterprise III indefinite-delivery, indefinite-quantity (IDIQ) contracts. Agency Report (AR), Tab 6, RFP at 63; Tab 17, Source Selection Decision (SSD) at 1.¹ The solicitation sought proposals for enterprise application IT lifecycle services focused “on maintaining and enhancing an application’s current capability while identifying future capability needs and eliminating capability overlaps.” Contracting Officer Statement (COS) at 1.

The solicitation contemplated issuance of a single task order with a mix of time-and-materials and cost-reimbursable line items for a 1-year base period and four 1-year option periods. RFP at 2-7, 63. The solicitation provided that the agency would make its source selection decision using a “Highest Technically Evaluated Proposal with a Fair and Reasonable Price,” or HiTERP, methodology. *Id.* at 63, 66. The solicitation explained that the HiTERP selection would be a multi-step process where the agency would first evaluate offerors’ technical proposals to determine which proposal was the highest technically rated. *Id.* at 66. Only then would the agency request submission of a price proposal from the offeror with the highest technically rated proposal. For the evaluation of technical proposals, the solicitation established three evaluation factors, which it listed in descending order of importance: (1) relevant experience; (2) technical approach; and (3) transition. *Id.* at 67-68, 73. All three of the non-price factors included a number of subfactors, which were “equally weighted within each non-price factor.” *Id.* at 73.

After completing the technical evaluation and receiving a price proposal from the highest technically rated offeror, the agency would then evaluate that offeror’s price proposal for fair and reasonable pricing. RFP at 67. If the offeror’s price proposal was deemed to be fair and reasonable, the agency would issue the task order to that firm without receiving price proposals from the other offerors. *Id.* at 66-67. If, however, the agency could not find the offeror’s price proposal to be fair and reasonable, that offeror would no longer be considered for award and the agency would request a price proposal from the next highest technically rated offeror. *Id.* at 67. This process would continue until the agency was able to make award at a fair and reasonable price. *Id.*

The agency received technical proposals from four offerors, including CACI and Boeing. AR, Tab 17, SSD at 1. The agency issued the task order to Boeing on March 25, 2022, and CACI protested that source selection decision to our Office. COS at 1. We dismissed the protest as academic when the agency advised our Office of its intent to take corrective action by reevaluating proposals and making a new source selection decision. *CACI, Inc.--Federal, B-420729, May 10, 2022.*

¹ Our citations are to documents’ Adobe PDF pagination.

Following dismissal of CACI's first protest, the agency established a new source selection evaluation board (SSEB) composed of entirely different members from the original SSEB. COS at 2; AR, Tab 17, SSD at 1. The contracting officer did not provide any of the documentation from the original evaluation to the new SSEB, but instead instructed the new evaluators that "they were to make their own independent evaluation of the original four technical proposals." COS at 2. The new SSEB assigned the following adjectival ratings to Boeing's and CACI's proposals under the non-price factors, and ranked Boeing's proposal as the highest technically rated and CACI's proposal as the second highest technically rated:²

	CACI	Boeing
Relevant Experience	Good	Outstanding
Technical Approach	Good	Outstanding
Transition	Good	Outstanding

AR, Tab 17, SSD at 4. The source selection authority (SSA)--who was the same SSA for the March 2022 source selection--concurred with the new SSEB's evaluation of Boeing's proposal as the highest technically rated. *Id.* at 2, 4; COS at 2.

Having previously determined Boeing's proposed price to be fair and reasonable, the agency made a new source selection decision to issue the task order to Boeing in accordance with the solicitation's HiTERP methodology. COS at 2; AR, Tab 16, Original SSD at 2; Tab 17, SSD at 17. Following receipt of a debriefing, CACI filed this protest with our Office challenging the agency's new source selection decision.³ COS at 3.

DISCUSSION

The protester challenges the agency's reevaluation of proposals following the DIA's decision to take corrective action in response to CACI's earlier protest. First, CACI contends that the SSA unreasonably failed to reconcile the differences between the two evaluations. The protester also takes issue with the agency's reevaluation of proposals, arguing that its own proposal merited additional strengths and the assignment of higher adjectival ratings, and that the agency evaluated in a disparate manner. Additionally, CACI challenges the source selection decision resulting from the allegedly flawed evaluation, as well as maintaining that the SSA failed to look behind the adjectival ratings assigned to proposals in making the award decision. While we do not discuss in

² For each of the three non-price factors, the RFP established five possible adjectival ratings: outstanding, good, acceptable, marginal, and unacceptable. RFP at 70-72.

³ The issued task order has a total contract ceiling amount of \$536,788,063.57. Protest, exh. 3, Notice of Award at 1. As the value of the protested task order exceeds \$25 million, this protest is within our jurisdiction to hear protests of task orders placed under defense agency IDIQ contracts. 10 U.S.C. § 3406(f)(1)(B).

detail below every permutation of CACI's arguments, we have considered them all and find that none provides a basis to sustain the protest.

Differences Between Original and Post-Corrective Action Evaluations

As noted above, CACI protested the agency's original evaluation and source selection decision, in response to which the agency took corrective action, resulting in a new evaluation and source selection decision. The protester maintains that the SSA was required but failed to reconcile material changes between the original evaluation and the post-corrective action evaluation of proposals. Protest at 14-15. According to CACI, it was unreasonable for the SSA not "to seek some sort of explanation, or otherwise arrive at an understanding, as to why the evaluation findings and ratings significantly changed" when both CACI's and Boeing's proposals "remained exactly the same as before." *Id.* at 15. Specifically, CACI argues, among other things, that the new evaluators "inexplicably" assigned Boeing's proposal a rating of outstanding under every factor, whereas the prior evaluators assigned the proposal only a rating of good under every factor. *Id.* at 15, 21.

In support of this argument, CACI relies on our decision in *eAlliant*. Protest at 14-15, citing *eAlliant, LLC*, B-407332.6, B-407332.10, Jan. 14, 2015, 2015 CPD ¶ 58. In *eAlliant*, the record reflected that, during reevaluation, the agency removed six strengths it previously had assessed in the protester's proposal, which remained essentially the same. *eAlliant, LLC, supra* at 7. The record further reflected that the contemporaneous evaluation documents contradicted the explanation for the different evaluation results that the agency provided during the course of the protest. *Id.* at 10. Based on the record in *eAlliant*, we found that when the same SSA reviewed significantly different evaluation results of essentially the same proposal, submitted by the same offeror, under the same solicitation, it was incumbent upon the SSA to reconcile or explain the starkly different evaluation conclusions. *Id.* at 11. We noted, however, that our finding in *eAlliant* was not meant to indicate that an agency is prohibited in its corrective action from revising its evaluations of offerors' proposals, or from reaching different evaluation results or ratings. *Id.* at 12. Rather, under the particular circumstances presented in *eAlliant*, we concluded that the SSA was required to provide some explanation as to why the evaluation results were materially different than those reached in the prior evaluations

Here, the record does not reflect the sort of "starkly different" evaluation results at issue in *eAlliant*. Rather, the record here shows that the agency assembled a new SSEB with instructions "to be independent and evaluate without comparison" to the original evaluation (with which CACI had taken issue in its first protest). COS at 4; see also AR, Tab 17, SSD at 1. Further, while the specific characteristics of CACI's proposal that the new SSEB considered to be adequate or strengths were somewhat different than the original SSEB, the record shows that the second SSEB viewed CACI's proposal more favorably overall than the original SSEB. See Protest at 17; AR, Tab 13, CACI Original Evaluation at 2-3 compare with AR, Tab 14, CACI Reevaluation at 2; see also COS at 4. For instance, the first SSEB assessed zero significant strengths, ten strengths,

five “adequates,” and one weakness in CACI’s proposal when assigning it a rating of good under the relevant experience and technical approach factors and a rating of acceptable under the transition factor.⁴ The new SSEB, on the other hand, assessed one significant strength, ten strengths, two adequates, and zero weaknesses in CACI’s proposal when assigning it a rating of good under all three factors. AR, Tab 13, CACI Original Evaluation at 1-12 *compare with* AR, Tab 14, CACI Reevaluation at 1-9. Similarly, the new SSEB viewed Boeing’s proposal more favorably overall, assessing nine significant strengths and four strengths when assigning Boeing’s proposal a rating of outstanding under all three factors; whereas, the first SSEB assessed fifteen strengths and two adequates in Boeing’s proposal when assigning it a rating of good under all three factors. AR, Tab 10, Boeing Original Evaluation at 1-10 *compare with* AR, Tab 11, Boeing Reevaluation at 1-10.

Our Office consistently has stated that the fact a reevaluation of proposals varies from the original evaluation does not constitute evidence that the reevaluation was unreasonable. *eAlliant, LLC, supra* at 10; *IAP World Servs., Inc.*, B-406339.2, Oct. 9, 2012, 2012 CPD ¶ 287 at 3. We have recognized that it is not unusual for different evaluators, or groups of evaluators, to reach different conclusions and assign different scores or ratings when evaluating proposals, as both objective and subjective judgments are involved. *MILVETS Sys. Tech., Inc.*, B-409051.7, B-409051.9, Jan. 29, 2016, 2016 CPD ¶ 53 at 7.

Here, CACI’s suggestion that the agency’s initial evaluation constituted the touchstone against which its final evaluation must compare presents a false premise. *CACI, Inc.--Fed.*, B-418400.7, B-418400.8, Apr. 29, 2021, 2021 CPD ¶ 192 at 8. Rather, the overriding concern in our review of a reevaluation following corrective action is not whether the final evaluation is consistent with an earlier evaluation, but rather, whether it is reasonable and consistent with the solicitation (which, as discussed below, we find the evaluation here to be). *HeiTech-PAE, LLC*, B-420049.9, B-420049.10, June 8, 2022, 2022 CPD ¶ 162 at 11-12. Accordingly, based on the record here, we do not find that the evaluations were so starkly different that it was incumbent upon the SSA to reconcile or explain the different conclusions reached by the evaluation teams.⁵ *Id.*

⁴ The solicitation provided for the assessment of strengths and weaknesses in the evaluation of proposals. With respect to these assessments, the available adjectives included: adequate, deficiency, risk, significant strength, strength, weakness, and significant weakness. RFP at 73. Relevant here, an “adequate” assessment was defined as “an acceptable aspect of the proposal that does not constitute a strength or a weakness.” *Id.*

⁵ In subsequent decisions, we have clarified that our *eAlliant* decision is limited to circumstances where the same SSA reviews “starkly different” evaluation conclusions of essentially the same proposal under the same solicitation, *Battelle Memorial Inst.*, B-418047.5, B-418047.6, Nov. 18, 2020, 2020 CPD ¶ 369 at 10, and the unique circumstance where the agency selection official was personally involved with reviewing proposals and affirmed specific conclusions about an offeror’s proposal. *HeiTech-PAE*,

(denying challenge to reevaluation that no longer described three aspects of protester's proposal as "beneficial" where the protester failed to demonstrate the reevaluation was starkly different from the original evaluation); *eAlliant, supra* at 12.

Notwithstanding that there was no requirement for the agency to reconcile the results of its reevaluation, the record reflects that the SSA, who was the same for both source selection decisions, did "review and compare the overall factor ratings given by the second team to those of the first team." AR, Tab 19, Decl. of SSA at 1. While the SSA did not (and was not required to) "compare in detail the findings of the second team with the findings of the first team," the SSA did conclude that the overall factor ratings assigned by the two teams, while not identical, appeared consistent, and that there "were no significant differences . . . nor were there any changes in the relative rank ordering of either [of] the offerors' proposals." *Id.* As such, we find no basis to sustain the protest.

Adjectival Ratings

Next, CACI contends that the assignment of adjectival ratings to the firm's proposal was inconsistent with the adjectival rating definitions set forth in the solicitation. The protester argues that its proposal merited assignment of a rating of outstanding, rather than good, under all three of the non-price factors.⁶ Protest at 15. The protester maintains that it was especially unreasonable for CACI's rating not to improve from good to outstanding given that, in the reevaluation, the new SSEB assessed zero weaknesses, less adequates, and one more significant strength, as compared to the original SSEB's evaluation. *Id.* at 16; Comments at 5-6. As discussed above, however, the evaluation of, and the assignment of ratings to, CACI's proposal under its original evaluation are not relevant to the reevaluation of the firm's proposal. In this regard, the mere fact that the agency identified fewer weaknesses and adequates in the firm's proposal for the first time during its reevaluation does not obligate the agency to assign the proposal a higher adjectival rating than assigned during its original evaluation. *Candor Solutions LLC*, B-417950.5, B-417950.6, May 10, 2021, 2021 CPD ¶ 199 at 10. Rather, the overriding concern in our review of the reevaluation of proposals is not

LLC, supra at 12 n.10; *DevTech Sys., Inc.*, B-418273.3, B-418273.4, Dec. 22, 2020, 2021 CPD ¶ 2 at 19.

⁶ As relevant here, the solicitation defined a rating of outstanding as applying to a proposal that met the solicitation's requirements, demonstrated an exceptional amount of expertise or an exceptional approach, had strengths that far outweighed any weaknesses, and presented a very low risk of unsuccessful performance. RFP at 70, 72. The solicitation defined a rating of good as applying to a proposal that met the requirements, indicated a thorough amount of expertise or a thorough approach, had strengths that outweighed any weaknesses, and presented a low risk of unsuccessful performance. *Id.*

whether the final ratings are consistent with earlier ratings, but whether they reasonably reflect the relative merits of the proposal. *Id.*

Additionally, our Office has rejected arguments that essentially seek a mathematical or mechanical consideration of the number of weaknesses assessed in an offer. *PricewaterhouseCoopers Public Sector, LLP*, B-415504, B-415504.2, Jan. 18, 2018, 2018 CPD ¶ 35 at 7. Rather, the essence of an agency's evaluation is reflected in the evaluation record itself, not the adjectival ratings, and the relevant question is whether the record shows that the agency fully considered the actual qualitative differences in offerors' proposals. *Id.* Further, as we have consistently explained, the ratings assigned to a proposal, be they numeric or adjectival, are merely guides for intelligent decision making. *Metis Solutions, LLC, et al.*, B-411173.2 *et al.*, July 20, 2015, 2015 CPD ¶ 221 at 13. The ratings assigned largely are immaterial, provided that the evaluators and source selection officials have considered the underlying bases for the ratings, including the specific advantages and disadvantages associated with the content of the proposals. *Advantage Tech., Inc.*, B-414974, B-414974.2, Oct. 27, 2017, 2017 CPD ¶ 340 at 4. The record here reflects that the agency gave detailed consideration to the content of CACI's proposal. Accordingly, we find unavailing CACI's objections to the adjectival ratings assigned to its proposal. See *e.g.*, *Candor Solutions, LLC, supra* at 10-11 (denying challenge to assignment of adjectival ratings as inconsistent with the solicitation, especially in light of the assessment of fewer weaknesses in the protester's proposal during post-corrective action reevaluation).

Evaluation of Proposals

The protester argues the agency failed to assess strengths merited in the firm's proposal, and contends that the agency evaluated in a disparate manner. Protest at 17-22; Comments at 8-20; Supp. Comments at 6-16. In a task order competition, the evaluation of proposals, primarily, is a matter within the contracting agency's discretion, as the agency is responsible for defining its needs and the best method of accommodating them. *CACI, Inc.--Fed., supra* at 5. When reviewing protests of such, we do not reevaluate proposals, but examine the record to determine whether the evaluation and source selection decision are reasonable and consistent with the solicitation and applicable procurement laws and regulations. *Id.*; *Battelle Memorial Inst., supra* at 5. A protester's disagreement with the agency's judgment of the relative merit of competing proposals, without more, does not establish that the evaluation was unreasonable. *Id.*; *Candor Solutions, LLC, supra* at 5.

Additional Strengths in CACI's Proposal

The protester maintains that "[t]he [a]gency clearly failed to award significant strengths under each of the evaluation factors to aspects of CACI's proposal that appreciably exceeded specific requirements in a way that will be appreciably advantageous to [the agency] during contract performance." Protest at 17. The protester cites to seven aspects of its proposal it contends merited assessment of significant strengths--five under the relevant experience factor, and one each under the technical approach and

transition factors. *Id.* at 18-19. We have reviewed all the arguments in this regard and find none provides a basis to sustain the protest. Below, we discuss some of the additional strengths the protester contends should have been assessed under the most important evaluation factor, relevant experience.

The solicitation required offerors to “demonstrate experience and expertise with a previous or current contract that is relevant, meets the size (minimum 200 [full-time equivalent]), similar scope (technical and functional areas), and complexity to this solicitation.” RFP at 68. The solicitation provided that the agency would evaluate offerors’ relevant experience under five equally important subfactor areas, one of which was future technology. *Id.* at 70. Specifically, the agency would evaluate offerors’ “relevant experience implementing and sustaining cloud technologies, and use of appropriate ML/AI [machine learning/artificial intelligence] technologies.” *Id.* The record shows that the evaluators assessed CACI’s proposal as adequate for this subfactor, noting that CACI’s proposal “provided limited descriptions of experience using appropriate ML/AI technologies,” and included only broad statements of examples that met the minimum requirements. AR, Tab 14, CACI Reevaluation at 2-3.

The protester asserts that its proposal merited the assessment of two significant strengths under subfactor 3 (Future Technology) for the firm’s: (1) “application of ML/AI to the [DELETED] disparate types of [DELETED] data encountered by the [DELETED] analyst as well as applying ML/AI techniques to [DELETED]”; and (2) demonstration of “[DELETED]-relevant experience where CACI leveraged [DELETED] to proactively seek solutions that we present to the [DELETED] customer” and “experience using appropriate ML/AI technologies on numerous relevant data sources.” Protest at 18; Comments at 15-16.

As the foundation of this argument, CACI points to the discussion included on pages 19-20⁷ of its proposal, and represents that the described experience “provides a clear advantage to the Government.” Protest at 18; see *also* Comments at 16. The protester contends that the evaluators’ failure to assess multiple significant strengths in the firm’s proposal as a result of the described experience “demonstrates the Agency clearly overlooked and ignored CACI’s proposal.” Comments at 16.

The record here does not support CACI’s contentions. Rather, the record shows that in reaching their conclusion that CACI’s proposal met, but did not exceed, the solicitation requirements, the evaluators cited to and quoted from the same pages of CACI’s proposal relied upon by the firm in its protest. AR, Tab 14, CACI Reevaluation at 2-3, *citing* pages 18-20 of CACI’s Proposal. The agency explains that CACI’s proposed use of [DELETED] “was not deemed to be a significant strength because following

⁷ The citations to the protester’s proposal in the record and in the parties’ filings are to the document’s internal pagination. For ease in locating the cited pages, we have converted the citations to the document’s Adobe PDF pagination. For example, the internal page numbers 4-6 of CACI’s proposal correspond to its Adobe PDF pagination 18-20. See AR, Tab 12, CACI Proposal.

[DELETED] does not appreciably exceed the performance requirements,” rather, “[i]t is what the government generally expects its contractors in any industry to do.” Memorandum of Law (MOL) at 21. Further, the evaluators considered CACI’s discussion of its application of ML/AI to “[DELETED]” types of data to provide “limited descriptions of experience using appropriate ML/AI technologies.” COS at 7, *citing* AR, Tab 14, CACI Reevaluation at 2.

In sum, CACI’s protest submissions and the contemporaneous evaluation record demonstrate only that CACI holds a different opinion from the evaluators about the information in CACI’s proposal addressing the firm’s experience with future technologies. As noted above, however, it is not our role to reevaluate proposals, and CACI’s disagreement with the evaluators’ subjective judgments, without more, is insufficient to establish that the agency’s evaluation was unreasonable. Accordingly, we deny this protest argument. See *e.g.*, *Systems Implementers, Inc.; Transcend Technological Systems, LLC*, B-418963.5 *et al.*, June 1, 2022, 2022 CPD ¶ 138 at 16 (denying contention that protester’s proposal merited assessment of multiple additional strengths for various aspects of protester’s experience where protester’s view of its experience as an advantage expressed nothing more than its disagreement with the evaluators subjective judgments).

Disparate Evaluation

In addition, CACI asserts there were numerous instances of disparate evaluation, claiming that aspects of its proposal which were the same as Boeing’s offerings were not assessed strengths or significant strengths as was Boeing’s proposal.⁸ Comments

⁸ CACI also generally takes issue with the agency’s evaluation of Boeing’s proposal. Specifically, the protester argues that it was unreasonable for the agency to assign a rating of outstanding to Boeing’s proposal under any of the evaluation factors given CACI’s contention, based on publicly available information, that Boeing lacks relevant experience. Protest at 20-21. CACI also challenges the agency’s conclusion that Boeing’s proposal “could be evaluated as presenting lower performance risk and a greater understanding than CACI and its teammates with their superior capabilities and intimate knowledge performing the majority of the work under the incumbent contracts,” especially when, according to the protester, CACI “had 100 [percent] of the incumbent OBP [object based production] SMEs [subject matter experts] that were effectively required for this work.” *Id.* Based on our review of the record, we find the agency reasonably evaluated Boeing’s experience as relevant and meriting a rating of outstanding. See *generally* AR, Tab 9, Boeing Proposal at 11-18, 40-43; Tab 11, Boeing Reevaluation at 1-5.

Moreover, we note that to the extent CACI argues its incumbency status entitles it to higher ratings or additional strengths/significant strengths, such arguments do not provide a basis for finding that the agency unreasonably evaluated proposals. *Candor Solutions, LLC, supra* at 15. Our office has repeatedly found that there is no requirement that an incumbent be given extra credit for its status as an incumbent, or

at 8-15, 17-20; Supp. Comments at 5-16. The protester alleges the agency's evaluation of proposals was disparate under all three of the non-price evaluation factors.

When a protester alleges disparate treatment in a technical evaluation, to prevail, it must show that the agency unreasonably evaluated its proposal in a different manner than another proposal that was substantively indistinguishable or nearly identical. *Battelle Memorial Inst.*, *supra* at 6; *Office Design Group v. United States*, 951 F.3d 1366, 1372 (Fed. Cir. 2020). In other words, a protester must show that the differences in evaluation did not stem from differences between the proposals in order to establish disparate treatment. *IndraSoft, Inc.*, B-414026, B-414026.2, Jan. 23, 2017, 2017 CPD ¶ 30 at 10; *Paragon Sys., Inc.*; *SecTek, Inc.*, B-409066.2, B-409066.3, June 4, 2014, 2014 CPD ¶ 169 at 8-9. Our review of the record here finds no basis to sustain any of the protester's allegations of disparate treatment.⁹ As representative examples, we examine the allegations of disparate treatment in the evaluation of proposals under two subfactors of the most important evaluation factor--relevant experience.¹⁰

Sustainment and Development Subfactor

Under the sustainment and development (S&D) subfactor of relevant experience, the solicitation provided the agency would evaluate offerors' "relevant experience

that an agency assign or reserve the highest rating for the incumbent offeror. *Id.* Nor does the offer of incumbent personnel entitle a proposal to special consideration or necessitate a higher rating than other offerors. *Id.* at 15 n.12.

⁹ The protester generally challenges as disparate the agency's evaluation under the technical approach factor and the transition factor because the information provided to CACI during its debriefing indicated that both CACI's and Boeing's proposals received the same number of strengths/significant strengths under these factors, yet, Boeing's proposal was assigned ratings of outstanding while CACI's proposal was assigned ratings of good. Protest at 20-21. As previously noted, our Office repeatedly has rejected protest arguments that essentially seek a mathematical or mechanical consideration of the number of strengths or weaknesses assessed in an offer. *PricewaterhouseCoopers Public Sector, LLP*, *supra* at 7. Accordingly, we find CACI's general assertions of disparate evaluation under the technical approach and transition evaluation factors provide no basis to sustain the protest.

¹⁰ The solicitation set forth five equally important subfactors under relevant experience: (1) sustainment and development; (2) functional processes; (3) future technology; (4) authority to operate; and (5) object based production. RFP at 68. CACI raises assertions of disparate evaluation under subfactors 1, 2, and 3. Comments at 8-14, 17-18; Supp. Comments at 6-11. We discuss herein our conclusion that CACI's contentions under the first and second subfactors fail to show that differences in the evaluation did not stem from differences in the proposals, and, while not discussed herein, we similarly find that CACI's contentions under the future technology subfactor fail to demonstrate the agency evaluated proposals in a disparate manner.

performing sustainment and development, for applications, microservices, and Platform as a Service (PaaS) . . . focusing on the complete intelligence cycle.” RFP at 70. The record shows the evaluators assessed a significant strength in Boeing’s proposal under the S&D subfactor, and found that Boeing’s “proposal appreciably exceeds specified performance of sustaining and development against the A&P [analysis and production] COI [community of interest] list of applications along with other similar applications and capabilities that will shorten the Government’s schedules for understanding and implementation that is appreciably advantageous to the Government during contract performance.” AR, Tab 11, Boeing Reevaluation at 1-2. In reaching this conclusion, the evaluators noted five different aspects of Boeing’s proposal that collectively merited assessment of a significant strength. *Id.* With respect to CACI’s proposal, the evaluators noted four aspects of CACI’s proposal that collectively merited assessment of a strength under the S&D subfactor, and found that CACI’s “relevant experience [would] ensure minimum mission downtime in sustaining and developing . . . systems, which exceeds the Government’s stated requirements and will be advantageous to the Government during contract performance.” AR, Tab 14, CACI Reevaluation at 1.

The protester claims that “for each specific aspect of [Boeing’s] proposal identified to support the assignment of a significant strength, CACI’s proposal also contained the same aspects but did not receive a significant strength.” Comments at 12-14, 17-18. For example, with respect to Boeing’s experience providing “24x7^[11] support of sustainment and development activities on [DELETED],” CACI cites to a paragraph in its proposal stating that CACI sustains applications “across [DELETED] classified and unclassified networks, including [DELETED], supporting 24x7 intelligence collection, analysis, and production operations support.” Comments at 13, *citing* AR, Tab 12, CACI Proposal at 33 (emphasis omitted).

The paragraph to which CACI cites in support of this disparate evaluation allegation, however, is in the section of its proposal addressing subfactor 4 (authority to operate) of the technical approach factor, rather than the section of its proposal addressing the relevant experience factor. Supp. MOL at 20; AR, Tab 12, CACI Proposal at 32-33. The solicitation established that, under the relevant experience factor, the agency would evaluate offerors’ relevant experience in the identified subfactor areas. RFP at 69-70. In contrast, under the technical approach factor, the agency would evaluate offerors’ technical approaches to those areas identified by the subfactors. *Id.* at 71. In other words, under technical approach, the agency would evaluate not what the offeror had prior experience doing, but “how the [o]fferor will provide the services within the PWS.” *Id.* While CACI discussed its plan to provide 24x7 support in the technical approach section of its proposal, nowhere in the proposal portion responding to the requirements of relevant experience does CACI reference having experience previously providing 24x7 support for S&D activities. See AR, Tab 12, CACI’s Proposal at 15-22. Our Office has recognized that an agency generally is not required to search other sections of an offeror’s proposal for information to meet requirements related to a different section. *SMS Data Products Group, Inc.*, B-418925.2, Nov. 25, 2020, 2020 CPD ¶ 387 at 10 n.6.

¹¹ The term “24x7” is a colloquial expression for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

In an attempt to bolster its argument by citing to the relevant portion of its proposal addressing the relevant experience factor, CACI asserts that a reference to maintaining “operational system availability of [DELETED]” in this section “demonstrate[d] its 24x7 support” experience Supp. Comments at 10, *citing* AR, Tab 12, CACI Proposal at 16. Contrary to CACI’s assertion, however, agencies are not required to infer information from an inadequately detailed proposal; rather, it is an offeror’s responsibility to submit a well-written proposal with adequate detailed information to clearly demonstrate compliance with the solicitation requirements and allow for a meaningful review by the procuring agency. *Candor Solutions, LLC, supra* at 9.

Here, in contrast to CACI’s proposal, Boeing pointed to one of its reference contracts and specifically noted the firm’s “experience [in] providing 24x7 [DELETED] support,” which “enabled [its] applications to have [DELETED] across the enterprise.” AR, Tab 9, Boeing Proposal at 13. Based on this record, we conclude that the agency did not evaluate in a disparate manner; rather, the differences in the evaluations resulted from differences in the clarity of the offerors’ proposals. See *e.g., Innovative Mgmt. Concepts, Inc.*, B-419834.2, B-419834.3, Sept. 20, 2021, 2021 CPD ¶ 319 at 11 (denying protest claiming disparate evaluation with respect to awardee’s offering of a 24x7 call center where record showed that protester’s discussion of 24x7 support was in a different section of the proposal addressing on-call procedures, not its approach to providing the required call center operations).

The second element of Boeing’s proposal noted by the evaluators as contributing to their assessment of a significant strength was that Boeing demonstrated relevant experience “[DELETED] to [DELETED] on [DELETED] for [DELETED] COTS [commercial off-the-shelf], GOTS [government off-the-shelf] and FOSS [free and open source software] components [DELETED], [DELETED] applications to [DELETED], support and development of [DELETED], and addressing [DELETED].” AR, Tab 11, Boeing Reevaluation at 1. The protester focuses on the portion of this element pertaining to Boeing’s experience [DELETED] COTS, GOTS and FOSS applications. Comments at 13. According to CACI, its proposal likewise addressed the firm’s experience [DELETED] COTS products, [DELETED], and performing [DELETED] to assist [DELETED] COTS applications. *Id.*, *citing* AR, Tab 12, CACI Proposal at 16. Notably, the protester does not claim that its proposal also discussed experience with [DELETED] of GOTS and FOSS products or [DELETED] applications to [DELETED], nor does a review of the sections of CACI’s proposal addressing relevant experience reveal such a discussion. See AR, Tab 12, CACI Proposal at 15-17; Supp. MOL at 21. Accordingly, the protester’s argument fails to demonstrate that the proposals were substantively indistinguishable where Boeing’s proposal discussed experience with COTS, GOTS, FOSS, and [DELETED], while CACI’s proposal discussed experience with COTS, but not with GOTS, FOSS, or [DELETED].

As a further example, CACI contends its proposal should have received similar credit for the fourth aspect of Boeing’s proposal noted by the evaluators--the firm’s demonstrated experience with development and sustainment “across [DELETED] and [DELETED] in [DELETED]’ using [DELETED] with a [DELETED] uptime.” Comments at 13-14, *citing*

AR, Tab 11, Boeing Reevaluation at 1-2. In support of its argument, CACI points to statements in its proposal that it has experience “performing sustainment activities, resulting in an operational system availability of [DELETED],” and that the firm “provide[s] application sustainment through our [DELETED] support in [DELETED], [DELETED], and [DELETED] with [DELETED]. . . .” Comments at 13-14, *citing* AR, Tab 12, CACI Proposal at 16-17 (internal citations to PWS sections omitted).

The agency explains that while both Boeing’s and CACI’s proposals mention experience with [DELETED] sustainment, [DELETED] application availability, and have some other of the same keywords, the evaluators “did not find those elements beneficial independent of each other.” Supp. MOL at 22-23. Rather, the evaluators considered Boeing’s experience providing these services across “[DELETED]” to be distinguishing. *Id.* at 23, *citing* AR, Tab 11, Boeing Reevaluation at 1 (emphasis omitted). CACI responds that its proposal also demonstrated that it has experience at more than [DELETED], including several [DELETED]. Supp. Comments at 10-11, *citing* AR, Tab 12, CACI Proposal at 16.

The record does not support CACI’s contention. Whereas, the aspect of Boeing’s proposal noted by the evaluators as contributing to assessment of a significant strength had to do with the firm’s experience providing development and sustainment services across [DELETED], the discussion of [DELETED] experience to which CACI cites in its own proposal relates to experience providing training--not development and sustainment activities. Specifically, the full sentence from which CACI selectively quotes in support of its argument states: “In line with the DIA Chief Information Officer (CIO) Strategic goals for customer centricity and workforce management, we equipped our workforce by training [DELETED] users over the past six years at more than [DELETED], including [DELETED].” AR, Tab 12, CACI Proposal at 16; *compare with* AR, Tab 9, Boeing Proposal at 12 (“Out team leveraged [DELETED] and [DELETED] to [DELETED] deployment and management of many products across [DELETED].”). CACI’s selective (and inaccurate) comparison of the agency’s evaluation of proposals fails to demonstrate that the evaluation was disparate or otherwise unreasonable. See *e.g., Blue Origin Federation, LLC; Dynetics, Inc.--A Leidos Co., B-419783 et al.*, July 30, 2021, 2021 CPD ¶ 265 at 44 (denying allegation of disparate evaluation where protester’s “selective and broad comparison of NASA’s evaluation of the offerors’ respective proposals fail[ed] to demonstrate that NASA’s evaluation was unequal or otherwise unreasonable”).

Functional Processes Subfactor

Turning to the agency’s evaluation of proposals under the functional processes subfactor of relevant experience, the solicitation established the agency would evaluate offerors’ “relevant experience supporting Analysis and Production functional processes to sustain applications and providing data processing/acquisition (to include extract, transform and load).” RFP at 70 (internal citations to PWS sections omitted). The record shows that the evaluators considered Boeing’s proposal to provide several “thorough examples” describing the firm’s experience supporting analysis and

production. AR, Tab 11, Boeing Reevaluation at 2. Similarly, the evaluators noted Boeing's proposal "provided several examples" of its "experience in applying the processes and applications needed" for data processing and acquisition specific to DIA. *Id.* at 2-3. Further, the evaluators took note of Boeing's [DELETED] experience, which exceeded the solicitation requirements. *Id.* at 3. Overall, the evaluators concluded the combined elements of Boeing's proposal merited assessment of a significant strength, as the firm's offerings "exceed[ed] specified performance and capability requirements" in a way "that will be advantageous to the Government in terms of contract performance in direct support to mission processes and workflows and accelerated data schedules during contract performance." *Id.*

With respect to CACI's proposal, the evaluators found that the firm "provided relevant experience that demonstrated an understanding of how to support A&P functional processes to extract, transform, and load data for processing and acquisition." AR, Tab 14, CACI Reevaluation at 2. The evaluators also noted elements of CACI's proposal that "attest to the Offeror's experience on [DELETED] and [DELETED] in supporting and providing data acquisition," as well as showing "sustainment and Agile development processes that allow close coordination to accomplish an array of activities supporting data processing." *Id.* The evaluators further noted, however, that CACI's response "regarding their relevant experience in supporting A&P functional processes to sustain applications was minimal." *Id.* Overall, the evaluators concluded the combined elements of CACI's proposal merited assessment of an adequate, rather than any strengths or weaknesses, as the firm's offerings "met but did not exceed the level of experience required to support Analysis and Production functional processes, sustain A&P COI applications, and data processing/acquisition." *Id.*

The protester points to three aspects of its proposal that it claims are the same as, or better than, aspects of Boeing's proposal which the evaluators found contributed to assessment of a significant strength in Boeing's proposal, but not CACI's. Comments at 8-10; Supp. Comments at 6-8. The protester does not, however, substantively challenge the evaluators' finding that CACI's proposal included only a minimal discussion of the firm's experience supporting A&P functional processes to sustain applications. *See id. generally.* Accordingly, even were we to agree with CACI that the three aspects of its proposal on which it focuses were substantively indistinguishable from the corresponding aspects of Boeing's proposal, the sections of the firms' proposals addressing the functional processes subfactor still would not be overall substantively indistinguishable. Rather, while both proposals would share three elements the evaluators considered contributory to the assessment of a significant strength in Boeing's proposal, CACI's proposal would still have a negative finding not present in Boeing's proposal. Instead, with respect to experience supporting A&P, the evaluators considered Boeing's proposal to include "thorough examples" as compared to CACI's minimal discussion.

Competitive prejudice is an essential element of any viable protest; where a protester fails to demonstrate that, but for the agency's actions, it would have had a substantial chance of receiving the award, there is no basis for finding prejudice, and our Office will

not sustain the protest, even if deficiencies in the procurement are found. *Blue Origin Federation, LLC; Dynetics, Inc.--A Leidos Co., supra* at 33. Here, even if CACI's arguments were successful, the record would continue to reflect that the difference in evaluations under the functional processes subfactor stemmed from qualitative differences in the proposals. Accordingly, we deny this allegation of disparate evaluation. See e.g., *American Sys. Corp.*, B-420132 *et al.*, Dec. 13, 2021, 2021 CPD ¶ 387 at 10-11 n.7 (denying allegation of disparate treatment regarding assessment of a weakness in the protester's proposal because protester would not have been competitively prejudiced by the alleged error).

Source Selection Decision

Finally, CACI argues that the agency's source selection decision was flawed as a result of flaws in the underlying evaluation and failed to look behind the adjectival ratings assigned to the proposals. Protest at 22; Comments at 20-22; Supp. Comments at 16-17. With respect to CACI's contention that flawed evaluation input resulted in flawed source selection decision output, this challenge is derivative of the protester's above-denied challenges to the underlying evaluation. As we find no basis to object to the underlying evaluation, we dismiss this argument because derivative allegations do not establish an independent basis of protest. *DirectVizSolutions, LLC*, B-417565.3, B-417565.4, Oct. 25, 2019, 2019 CPD ¶ 372 at 9.

As to CACI's contention that the SSA failed to look behind the adjectival ratings assigned by the evaluators in selecting the highest technically rated proposal, the record shows otherwise. The source selection decision substantiates that the SSA undertook a detailed review and comparison of the content and merits of competing proposals in reaching the conclusion that Boeing's proposal was the highest technically rated. AR, Tab 17, SSD at 4-11, 15-17. Based on this analysis, the SSA made the determination to issue the task order to Boeing in accordance with the solicitation's HiTERP source selection methodology. *Id.* at 17. Based on our review of the record, we find the agency's source selection decision reasonable, consistent with the solicitation, and adequately documented.

The protest is denied.

Edda Emmanuelli Perez
General Counsel