



Decision

Matter of: B. French Consulting GmbH

File: B-421515

Date: May 9, 2023

Ronald E. Pacheco for the protester.
Adam K. Lasky, Esq., and Stephanie Magnell, Esq., Seyfarth Shaw LLP, for Vectrus Systems Corporation, the intervenor.
Wayne Branom, Esq., Department of Defense, for the agency.
Michelle E. Litteken, Esq., and Christina Sklarew, Esq., Office of the General Counsel, GAO, participated in the preparation of the decision.

DIGEST

Protest challenging the agency's evaluation of the protester's proposal as technically unacceptable is denied where the evaluation was reasonable and consistent with the solicitation's evaluation criteria.

DECISION

B. French Consulting GmbH (B. French), of Sinsheim, Germany, protests its exclusion from the competition under request for proposals (RFP) No. HQ084722R0001, issued by the Department of Defense (DOD), Washington Headquarters Services, for information technology/information management (IT/IM) support services.

We deny the protest.

BACKGROUND

The solicitation sought a contractor to provide IT/IM support services to the George C. Marshall Center for European Studies.¹ The RFP contemplated the award of a fixed-

¹ The George C. Marshall Center for European Studies, located in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, is one of five regionally focused security studies organizations managed by the Defense Security Cooperation Agency. Req. for Dismissal at 2 n.1. The center's mission is "to create a more stable security environment by advancing democratic institutions and relationships; promoting active, peaceful, whole-of-

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price contract with a 1-year base period and four 1-year option periods. PWS at 2-3.

The solicitation required proposals to be submitted in the following four volumes: (1) administrative; (2) pass/fail labor certifications; (3) technical approach and capability; (4) past performance; and price. Req. for Dismissal, exh. C, RFP at 80. As relevant here, for the pass/fail labor certifications volume, offerors were to submit a completed template provided in attachment 6 to the RFP, "labor requirements and qualifications," with the names, certifications, and experience levels for each labor category listed in the PWS, along with copies of all certifications. *Id.* at 83. The solicitation required offerors to propose personnel who met the certification requirements in DOD Manual 8570.01-M for the category and level functions in which the personnel would perform.² PWS at 12. Contractor personnel were required to obtain the specified DOD-approved baseline certifications prior to being engaged. *Id.* Attachment 6 to the RFP specified the certifications and qualifications for each position. For example, personnel proposed to provide tier one help desk support services were required to hold an Information Assurance Technician (IAT) level II security+ certification and have at least 2 years of help desk experience.³ Req. for Dismissal, exh. F, RFP attach. 6 at 1.

The solicitation explained the evaluation of the completed labor requirements and qualifications template as follows:

The Government will evaluate a proposal ONLY IF the offer/proposal satisfies all of the following element, which will be evaluated on a pass/fail basis*:

- (1) The Offeror submits a completed Attachment 6 – Labor Requirements and Qualifications along with copies of all certifications required for each labor category listed in the PWS. If the Government determines that an Offeror does not meet the certification requirements criteria listed by the proposal due date, the Offeror shall receive a "fail" and

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government approaches to address transnational and regional security challenges; and creating and enhancing enduring partnerships worldwide." Req. for Dismissal, exh. B, Performance Work Statement (PWS) at 1.

² DOD Manual 8570.01-M provides guidance and procedures for the training, certification, and management of the DOD workforce conducting information assurance functions. Req. for Dismissal, exh. D, DOD Manual 8570.01-M at 2.

³ DOD Manual 8570.01-M describes IAT level II functions as follows: "IAT Level II personnel provide network environment (NE) and advanced level [computing environment] support. They pay special attention to intrusion detection, finding and fixing unprotected vulnerabilities, and ensuring that remote access points are well secured. These positions focus on threats and vulnerabilities and improve the security of systems." Req. for Dismissal, exh. D, DOD Manual 8570.01-M at 27.

no further evaluation of pass/fail criteria number four will be performed. The Offeror will not be considered for award.

*Offerors will only be eligible for award after an evaluation is conducted in accordance with the aforementioned criteria. If the Offeror receives a “fail” for the element listed above, the Offeror’s proposal will not be evaluated further.

RFP at 85. The solicitation provided that award would be made using a best-value tradeoff that would consider the following factors: technical approach and capability; past performance; and price. *Id.* The non-price factors were of equal importance, and when combined, were significantly more important than price. *Id.*

The agency received five proposals, including the protester’s, before the deadline for submission. Req. for Dismissal, exh. A, Unsuccessful Offeror Notification at 1. The agency reviewed B. French’s completed labor requirements and qualifications template and determined that the protester’s proposal did not satisfy the pass/fail criteria. Req. for Dismissal at 1; *see also* Req. for Dismissal, exh. A, Unsuccessful Offeror Notification at 1-2. The agency found that although the protester proposed a sufficient number of personnel to provide tier one help desk support, one of the individuals that B. French proposed lacked the required IAT level II security+ certification. *Id.* at 2. Because B. French’s proposal did not satisfy the pass/fail labor requirements and qualifications criteria, the agency did not evaluate the proposal under the other factors. The agency selected Vectrus Systems Corporation’s proposal for award. *Id.*

After requesting and receiving a debriefing, B. French filed this protest with our Office.⁴

⁴ Because the protester is not represented by counsel in this matter, no protective order was issued. Accordingly, our discussion in this decision is necessarily general in nature to avoid reference to nonpublic information. Our conclusions, however, are based on our review of the entire record.

Before the deadline for the submission of the agency report, the agency filed a request for dismissal, arguing that the protester failed to state an adequate legal and factual basis for protest. *See* Req. for Dismissal. After reviewing the protester’s response, our Office advised the parties that we intended to issue a decision resolving the protest based on the existing record, but we afforded the agency with the opportunity to file an additional submission, and the protester and intervenor to respond to any such submission. The agency filed a second request for dismissal, arguing that the supplemental protest ground raised in the protester’s response to the first request for dismissal was untimely. *See* n.6, *infra*.

DISCUSSION

B. French challenges the agency's evaluation of its proposal under the pass/fail labor requirements and qualifications criteria. The protester concedes that one of its proposed candidates lacked the IAT level II security+ certification required to provide tier one help desk support under the terms of the solicitation, but contends that the individual holds a different certification, CompTIACloud+ Advanced, which, the protester asserts, satisfies DOD's requirements. Protest at 3-4. The agency maintains that this candidate did not satisfy the specific labor requirements and qualifications criteria. Req. for Dismissal at 8-9.

In reviewing protests challenging the evaluation of an offeror's proposal, it is not our role to reevaluate proposals; rather, our Office examines the record to determine whether the agency's judgment was reasonable, and in accordance with solicitation criteria and applicable procurement statutes and regulations. *Patriot Def. Grp., LLC*, B-418720.3, Aug. 5, 2020, 2020 CPD ¶ 265 at 7. A protester's disagreement with the agency's judgment does not establish that the evaluation or source selection decision was unreasonable. *The Ginn Grp., Inc.*, B-420165, B-420165.2, Dec. 22, 2021, 2022 CPD ¶ 17 at 9; *Innovative Mgmt. Concepts, Inc.*, B-408070.2, Dec. 4, 2013, 2014 CPD ¶ 49 at 3.

As noted above, the solicitation required offerors to propose personnel who, at a minimum, met the certification requirements in DOD Manual 8570.01-M for each position, and specified those requirements in an attachment to the RFP. The solicitation established that if an offeror failed to meet the certification requirements, the proposal would not be evaluated under the remaining factors, and it would not be considered for award. RFP at 85. As relevant here, personnel providing tier one help desk support services were required to hold an IAT level II security+ certification.⁵ Req. for Dismissal, exh. F, RFP attach. 6 at 1. The solicitation did not provide that offerors could substitute certifications for a given position.

The protester proposed three individuals to provide tier one help desk support services: two candidates with the required IAT level II security+ certifications and one who lacked the certification. Req. for Dismissal at 3. The third candidate held a CompTIACloud+ Advanced certificate. *Id.* The agency determined that B. French's proposal did not satisfy the labor requirements and qualifications criteria because the third proposed candidate lacked the required IAT level II security+ certification.

⁵ Vendors were permitted to submit questions prior to submitting proposals, and the questions and answers from the agency were then included in the solicitation. No prospective offeror questioned whether the CompTIACloud+ Advanced certification could be used to satisfy the IAT II level II security+ certification requirement for tier one help desk services, nor did any offeror question whether IAT level II was the appropriate certification for the labor category. See Req. for Dismissal, exh. G.

B. French argues that DOD should have accepted the CompTIA Cloud+ Advanced certificate because the certificate “is intended for mid-level IT professionals with 3 years’ experience in cybersecurity.” Protest at 3. The protester asserts that the CompTIA Cloud+ Advanced certificate exceeds the requirements to obtain IAT level II security+ certification and qualifies an individual for a higher level position. *Id.*

B. French contends that the agency’s interpretation of DOD Manual 8570.01-M and the baseline certifications is unreasonable and asserts that the third candidate’s qualifications are sufficient.⁶ Resp. to Req. at 2. DOD responds that it properly rated the protester’s proposal as unacceptable because the CompTIA Cloud+ Advanced certificate⁷ does not satisfy the RFP’s specific IAT level II certification requirement. Req. for Dismissal at 3; see *also* Req. for Dismissal, exh. H, DOD Approved 8570 Baseline Certifications.

Our review of the record confirms the reasonableness of the agency’s evaluation.⁸ It is an offeror’s responsibility to submit a well-written proposal, with adequately detailed information that clearly demonstrates compliance with the solicitation requirements and allows a meaningful review by the procuring agency. *Innovative Pathways, LLC*,

⁶ In the protester’s response to the agency’s request for dismissal, B. French argues--for the first time--that it was unreasonable for the agency to find its proposal ineligible for award based on the lack of IAT level II security+ certification. The protester contends that it proposed two candidates with the required certifications to provide tier one help desk support and argues further that two personnel would be sufficient to perform the work. Resp. to Req. for Dismissal at 4. To the extent that the protester’s response raises an additional challenge to the agency’s evaluation, we find the argument untimely. Our regulations do not contemplate the piecemeal presentation or development of protest issues through later submissions citing examples or providing alternate or more specific legal arguments missing from earlier general allegations of impropriety. *LOGMET LLC*, B-420507, May 6, 2022, 2022 CPD ¶ 112 at 3 n.5. Accordingly, we dismiss the allegation. *Id.*

⁷ The CompTIA Cloud+ Advanced Certificate can be used to qualify for information assurance manager level I (a different position category in DOD Manual 8570.01-M), but it is absent from the list of credentials that qualifies an individual under IAT level II. Req. for Dismissal at 3; see *also* Req. for Dismissal, exh. H, DOD Approved 8570 Baseline Certifications.

⁸ To the extent the protester disagrees with the agency’s conclusions regarding whether the agency was required to accept a CompTIA Cloud+ Advanced certificate as a substitute for the required IAT level II certification--this disagreement does not provide a basis to sustain the protest. *AmVet Techs., LLC*, B-415150.2, B-415150.3 June 5, 2018, 2018 CPD ¶ 202 at 5. The fact remains that the RFP required personnel proposed to perform tier one help desk support hold an IAT level II security+ certification, and the RFP did not permit substitutions of other certifications. Req. for Dismissal, exh. F, RFP attach. 6 at 1.

B-416100.2, June 13, 2018, 2018 CPD ¶ 212 at 5. Here, the solicitation required that personnel proposed to provide tier one help desk support hold an IAT level II security+ certification, and it established that a proposal that failed to satisfy the certification requirements criteria would not be considered for award. RFP at 85. The solicitation did not permit offerors to substitute other certifications in lieu of the IAT level II security+ certification. B. French proposed an individual who lacked the required certification. Accordingly, we find nothing unreasonable with respect to the agency's determination that the protester's proposal was unacceptable under the labor qualifications and requirements criteria.

The protest is denied.

Edda Emmanuelli Perez
General Counsel