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Decision

Matter of: DCS Corporation

File: B-423482.2

Date: September 12, 2025

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Matney E. Rolfe, Esq., Colonel Nina R. Padalino, and Catherine J. McSwain, Esq., Department of the Air Force, for the agency.

Michael P. Grogan, Esq., and Evan D. Wesser, Esq., Office of the General Counsel, GAO, participated in the preparation of the decision.

DIGEST

Challenge to the evaluation of the protester's quotation is denied where the record demonstrates the agency's evaluation was reasonable and consistent with the terms of the solicitation.

DECISION

DCS Corporation, of Alexandria, Virginia, protests its non-selection for award of an order under request for quotations (RFQ) No. FA2318-25-Q-B001, issued by the Department of the Air Force, for global mobility and special mission planning systems.¹ The protester contends that the agency misevaluated its quotation and conducted a flawed best-value tradeoff analysis.

We deny the protest.

¹ The awardees are MORSECORP, Inc., of Cambridge, Massachusetts, The Boeing Company, of Berkeley, Missouri, and Jacobs Engineering Group, of Arlington, Virginia.

BACKGROUND

The agency issued the solicitation on October 22, 2024, pursuant to the procedures of Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) subpart 8.4 (Federal Supply Schedules) to firms holding the General Services Administration's multiple-award federal supply schedule (FSS) contract for engineering services (541330ENG). Agency Report (AR), Tab 46, Instructions for Quotation Preparation (IFPQ) at 5.² The RFQ contemplated the issuance of up to three orders, with a 6-month base period of performance, and four 1-year option periods. AR, Tab 6, RFQ at 2. The Air Force sought agile software development and sustainment services, systems engineering services, and continuous integration/continuous delivery services. AR, Tab 12, Performance Work Statement (PWS) at 7.

The solicitation advised that award would be made on a best-value tradeoff basis, considering two factors: (1) technical; and (2) price. AR, Tab 42, Evaluation Criteria at 5. The technical factor had four subfactors: (a) data exchange; (b) innovation implementation; (c) mission planning modernization; and (4) air drop mission planning. *Id.* The Air Force would assign a technical approach adjectival rating, and a technical risk adjectival rating, for each of the subfactors.³ *Id.* at 7-9. Price would be evaluated for balance and reasonableness. *Id.* at 9. The RFQ provided that the technical factor (encompassing all subfactors) was significantly more important than price. *Id.* at 5. The solicitation further explained that data exchange was the most important subfactor, innovation implementation was the second most important, and mission planning modernization and air drop mission planning were of equal importance, but less important than the other two subfactors. *Id.*

The agency received multiple quotations by the November 20 due date, to include submissions by DCS, MORSECORP, Boeing, and Jacobs. Contracting Officer's Statement (COS) at 12. On or about April 11, 2025, the agency subsequently issued task orders to MORSECORP, Boeing, and Jacobs, but not DCS. *Id.* at 15. On April 21, DCS filed a protest with our Office, challenging the agency's evaluation of the firm's quotations and the Air Force's best-value decision. On April 29, we dismissed DCS's protest as academic, based on the agency's stated intention to undertake corrective action; the Air Force explained it would reevaluate the protester's quotation under the data exchange, innovation implementation, and mission planning modernization subfactors of the technical factor, and make a new award decision after completing the reevaluation. *DCS Corporation*, B-423482.2, Apr. 29, 2025 (unpublished decision).

² All citations to the record are to the corresponding electronic document page numbers.

³ Technical approach had five possible ratings: excellent/purple; good/blue; acceptable/green; marginal/yellow; and unacceptable/red. AR, Tab 42, Evaluation Criteria at 7-8. Technical risk had four possible ratings: low; moderate; high; and unacceptable. *Id.* at 9.

The Air Force reevaluated DCS's quotation against the identified three technical subfactors, explaining that for the data exchange subfactor, "the Agency provided more detailed explanations of the offeror's evaluation and changed the Technical Risk rating from High Risk to Moderate Risk because the Agency determined based on the definition in the evaluation criteria that Moderate risk rating was appropriate." COS at 17; see also AR, Tab 72, Post-Corrective Action Consensus Evaluation Document. The Air Force made no other material changes to DCS's evaluation under the innovation implementation and mission planning modernization subfactors. *Id.* The following represents the final revised evaluation ratings of DCS:

	DCS
Technical	
Data Exchange	Marginal/Yellow; Moderate Risk
Innovation Implementation	Acceptable/Green; Low Risk
Mission Planning Modernization	Acceptable/Green; Low Risk
Air Drop Missing Planning	Acceptable/Green; Low Risk
Total Evaluated Price	\$45,849,350

AR, Tab 73, Post-Corrective Action Award Decision Document at 2.

On or about May 29, the agency again issued task orders to MORSECORP, Boeing, and Jacobs, but not DCS. COS at 18. DCS filed the instant protest on June 9.

DISCUSSION

DCS challenges the agency's technical evaluation of its quotation. Protest at 15-24; Comments at 10-19. In this regard, the protester contends the Air Force's assessment of two negative attributes under the data exchange subfactor, and the assignment of a single negative attribute under the mission planning modernization subfactor, were unreasonable.⁴ For the reasons that follow, we find no basis to sustain the protest.⁵

⁴ A "negative aspect" was defined as an "aspect of an Offeror's response that demonstrates a lack of understanding of the [performance work statement] or [Global Mobility and Special Mission] Mission Planning Systems or proposes methods that increase risk in terms of cost, schedule or performance and/or increase the need for Government oversight, involvement, and management." AR, Tab 42, Evaluation Criteria at 7.

⁵ DCS raises other collateral allegations, and although our decision does not specifically address every argument presented, we have considered each argument and find that none provides a basis on which to sustain the protest. For example, the protester argues the agency improperly assigned the firm's quotation only an "acceptable/green" rating under the innovation implementation subfactor because, as it received one

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Where, as here, an agency issues an RFQ to FSS vendors under FAR subpart 8.4 and conducts a competition for the issuance of an order, we will review the record to ensure that the agency's evaluation was reasonable and consistent with the terms of the solicitation and applicable procurement laws and regulations. *Digital Solutions, Inc.*, B-402067, Jan. 12, 2010, 2010 CPD ¶ 26 at 3-4; *DEI Consulting*, B-401258, July 13, 2009, 2009 CPD ¶ 151 at 2. In reviewing a protest challenging an agency's technical evaluation, our Office will not reevaluate the quotations; rather, we will examine the record to determine whether the agency's evaluation conclusions were reasonable and consistent with the terms of the solicitation and applicable procurement laws and regulations. *OPTIMUS Corp.*, B-400777, Jan. 26, 2009, 2009 CPD ¶ 33 at 4. A protester's disagreement with the agency's judgment, without more, does not establish that an evaluation was unreasonable. *DEI Consulting, supra*.

DCS challenges the two negative attributes the Air Force assigned to the firm's quotation under the data exchange subfactor. Regarding this subfactor, the solicitation explained:

The Air Force has determined that the Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) military design series (MDS) data exchange capabilities are insufficient for the Great Power Competition (GPC). Current beyond line

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positive finding and zero negative findings, DCS was entitled to a "good/blue" rating under the terms of the RFQ. Protest at 21-22; Comments at 17-18.

We find the agency's assigned adjectival rating unobjectionable. Indeed, the Air Force's evaluation under this subfactor found that DCS's technical solution "demonstrated an adequate understating" of the PWS and that the "adequacy of the overall submission was not offset by the one positive aspect." AR, Tab 72, Post-Corrective Action Consensus Evaluation Document at 9. The agency's conclusions reasonably support the Air Force's assignment of a "green/acceptable" rating under this subfactor and are wholly consistent with the RFQ. See AR, Tab 42, Evaluation Criteria at 8 (explaining that a green/acceptable rating would be assigned where "[t]he offeror's response indicates an adequate understanding of Mission Planning Systems and the PWS" and "[a]ny positive aspects and negative aspects generally offset each other.").

Furthermore, it is well established that adjectival ratings are only guides for intelligent decision making in the procurement process, and the essence of an agency's evaluation is reflected in the evaluation record itself, not in the adjectival ratings. *B.L. Harbert Int'l, LLC*, B-422122.4, B-422122.5, Jan. 15, 2025, 2025 CPD ¶ 38 at 14. Whereas here the contemporaneous record reflects--and the protester offers no reasonable basis to question--that the agency reasonably considered the underlying merits of DCS's quotation, the protester's disagreement with the assigned adjectival rating, without more, provides no basis on which to sustain the protest. *Protection Strategies, Inc.*, B-416635, Nov. 1, 2018, 2019 CPD ¶ 33 at 7.

of sight (BLOS) must be enhanced to support aircraft tracking by the Recovery Operations Center (ROC), the Personnel Recovery Coordination Cell (PRCC), the Joint Personnel Recovery Agency (JPRC), and the Rescue Support Assets (RESCORT).

AR, Tab 46, IFPQ at 15. Vendors were asked to address two items. First, vendors were to “[d]iscuss the full range of impacts to the CSAR mission if the rotary MDS and support MDS obtain augmented communications through a portable communications open mission system.” *Id.* at 15-16. Second, vendors were to discuss “[w]hat are the most important, and achievable, data exchanges to develop in the next eight quarters for survivability of the crew, passengers, and aircraft[,] and to “[e]xplain why these are the most important data exchanges[.]” *Id.* at 16. The Air Force would evaluate (a) “[t]he extent to which the offeror demonstrates knowledge of the full range of impacts to the [CSAR] mission with regard to augmented communications[.]” and (b) “[t]he completeness and soundness of the offeror’s identification and analysis of the most important data exchanges for mission impact, and the extent to which they can be achieved within the next eight quarters.” AR, Tab 42, Evaluation Criteria at 6.

DCS received a “marginal/yellow” technical rating, and a “moderate” risk rating, under the data exchange subfactor. AR, Tab 72, Post-Corrective Action Consensus Evaluation Document at 3-4. The Air Force found zero positive attributes and two negative attributes. *Id.* Concerning the first negative attribute, the agency explained:

[T]he IFQP instructed Offerors to discuss the “full range of impacts” of augmented communications. The Offeror only identified the beneficial impacts and did not identify or discuss any negative impacts to the CSAR mission with augmented communication. The Offeror’s adequate identification of the beneficial impacts to augmenting communications did not offset the Offeror’s incomplete discussion of the full range of impacts.

Id. at 3-4; *see also id.* at 6 (“The Offeror’s lack of discussion of the full range of impacts, specifically the Offeror’s lack of demonstrated knowledge about any negative impacts or risks associated with new augmented communications, reflects a gap in their knowledge. The Offeror did not demonstrate an understanding of how the new technology could create challenges that will need to be considered and overcome.”).

DCS disagrees with the agency’s assessment, and offers several arguments in rebuttal, none of which we find persuasive. First, the protester contends the solicitation did not require vendors to discuss “negative impacts” as part of the “full range of impacts” to the CSAR mission (see AR, Tab 46, IFPQ at 15-16), so the Air Force’s negative assessment was unreasonable. See Protest at 15-18; Comments at 13-17. In this regard, DCS posits that the solicitation “indicated that the Agency already had determined that CSAR MDS capabilities were insufficient, which is a well-known fact” and this “suggested” the Air Force had already accounted for “vulnerabilities and negatives in the current CSAR mission[.]” Protest at 16. As such, DCS asserts it understood the “full range of impacts” to be a reference to the levels of warfare, and

accordingly, tailored its technical discussion to this point. Protest at 16; Comments at 15-17. Moreover, DCS argues that information contained in the RFQ's bidder library also suggested that addressing negative impacts under this subfactor was unnecessary. Protest at 16-17; Comments at 15-17.

Where a dispute exists as to a solicitation's actual requirements, we will first examine the plain language of the solicitation. *Sikorsky Aircraft Corp.*, B-416027, B-416027.2, May 22, 2018, 2018 CPD ¶ 177 at 11. Where there is a disagreement over the meaning of solicitation language, we will resolve the matter by reading the solicitation as a whole and in a manner that gives effect to all provisions; to be reasonable, an interpretation must be consistent with the solicitation when read as a whole and in a reasonable manner. *Crew Training Int'l, Inc.*, B-414126, Feb. 7, 2017, 2017 CPD ¶ 53 at 4.

As an initial matter, to the extent DCS argues otherwise, we agree with the agency and the intervenors that the plain meaning of the phrase "full range of impacts" would, necessarily, encompass both positive and negative impacts. See *Colt Def., LLC*, B-406696, Jul. 24, 2012, 2012 CPD ¶ 302 at 7 (GAO will defer to the plain meaning of a solicitation provision); *Valkyrie Enters., LLC*, B-415633.3, Jul. 11, 2019, 2019 CPD ¶ 255 at 5 (same). Moreover, based on our review of the record, DCS does not provide any reasonable basis to suggest that vendors were somehow not required to address negative impacts as part of their quotation under the data exchange subfactor. For example, DCS asserts that it believed the RFQ's requirement to address the "full range of impacts" instead mandated that vendors address impacts to the CSAR mission with respect to the "three levels of warfare" (strategic, operational, and tactical), not through a discussion of potential negative impacts. Protest at 16. However, DCS's position finds no support in the record. Indeed, nothing in the solicitation references a requirement for vendors to address the three levels of warfare, and nothing in DCS's technical quotation references these three levels, either.⁶

⁶ DCS's protest now suggests that despite not using, or otherwise referencing, the phrase "levels of warfare" explicitly, the Air Force should have understood its technical quotation to be referring to this concept. See Comments at 17 (referencing various elements in its technical slide presentation to suggest DCS was utilizing the three levels of warfare as a rubric). However, it is a vendor's responsibility to submit a well-written quotation, with adequately detailed information that clearly demonstrates compliance with the solicitation requirements. See *STG, Inc.*, B-411415, B-411415.2, July 22, 2015, 2015 CPD ¶ 240 at 5-6. A vendor risks having its quotation evaluated unfavorably where it fails to submit an adequately written quotation. See *International Med., Corps*, B-403688, Dec. 6, 2010, 2010 CPD ¶ 292 at 8. Here, even accepting DCS's interpretation of the solicitation concerning "full range of impacts" as reasonable (which we do not), DCS's quotation does not reasonably demonstrate it complied with the solicitation's preparation instructions to address the full range of impacts with respect to each of the three purported levels of warfare.

DCS also contends information in the bidder library--which included materials that may assist vendors in the development of their quotations--also suggested "that the Agency did not intend for offerors to focus on known vulnerabilities and negatives involving augmented communications[.]" Protest at 16. In this regard, the protester argues a video produced by an Air Force official "suggested that the Agency already had taken into account the vulnerabilities and negatives in the current CSAR mission and the effect they would have on any improvements." Comments at 15. As such, the protester reasons, it would be unreasonable for a vendor to further address negative aspects as part of its technical quotation under this subfactor. However, our review of the record does not support DCS's contention; the video's transcript does not reasonably suggest that the agency intended vendors to forego addressing the "full range of impacts to the CSAR mission" as required in the solicitation. See AR, Tab 5, Modernization Video Transcript at 1-11 (providing an overview to planning modernization, as well as communication issues facing the Air Force, but providing no information, directly or indirectly, that would reasonably suggest the agency did not seek to have vendors address both positive and negative aspects of the augmented communications systems). In short, DCS's interpretation of the RFQ's quotation preparation instructions and evaluation criteria is not reasonable, and we find no basis to object to the agency's technical evaluation findings.⁷

The protester also finds fault in the Air Force's assessment of a second negative under the data exchange subfactor. As noted above, vendors were to discuss, among other things, "[w]hat are the most important, and achievable, data exchanges to develop in the next eight quarters for survivability of the crew, passengers, and aircraft[.]" and to "[e]xplain why these are the most important data exchanges[.]" AR, Tab 46, IFPQ at 16. As relevant here, the agency would evaluate "[t]he completeness and soundness of the offeror's identification and analysis of the most important data exchanges for mission impact, and the extent to which they can be achieved within the next eight quarters." AR, Tab 42, Evaluation Criteria at 6.

The Air Force assigned DCS's quotation a negative under this subfactor because the firm "identified six important data exchanges[,] but did not discuss how the data exchanges could be achieved in the next 8 quarters[,] and "[i]nstead, the Offeror discussed how it could use data, (from not yet developed data exchanges), to create new user features." AR, Tab 72, Post-Corrective Action Consensus Evaluation Document at 4. The agency further explained that "[t]he Offeror appears to have drifted from discussing the most important data exchanges, and how they could be achieved, to discussing how the Offeror would use the data from these not-yet-developed" data exchanges. *Id.* at 8.

⁷ The protester also claims, in the alternative, that "even though DCS was not required to provide negative impacts, it did in fact do so at a higher level[.]" Protest at 16. However, our review of DCS's technical quotation does not support the protester's assertion that its quotation discussed any negative impacts. See AR, Tab 51, DCS's Technical Quotation at 12-13.

DCS disagrees with the agency's conclusions. For example, the protester contends the Air Force applied unstated evaluation criteria by requiring vendors to discuss how they would achieve the data exchanges identified in their quotations. Comments at 11 ("But requiring DCS to explain how it would achieve the identified data exchanges--as opposed to 'the extent to which they can be achieved'--amounts to unstated evaluation criteria[.]"). We disagree. When reviewing whether an agency applied unstated evaluation criteria, our decisions explain that an agency is required to evaluate quotations based solely on the factors identified in the solicitation. *IBM Global Business Serv.--U.S. Federal*, B-409029, B-409029.2, Jan. 27, 2014, 2014 CPD ¶ 43 at 4. While an agency may apply evaluation considerations that are not expressly outlined in the solicitation if those considerations are reasonably and logically encompassed within the stated evaluation criteria, there must be a clear nexus between the stated and unstated criteria. *Id.* As applied, we find reasonable the agency's evaluation judgments. That is, in assessing "[t]he extent to which" data exchanges can be achieved, the Air Force could naturally consider how that would occur. AR, Tab 42, Evaluation Criteria at 6.

Arguing in the alternative, DCS states that it did, in fact, state how it would achieve the data exchanges identified in its quotation within the next eight quarters, but the Air Force overlooked this information. Comments at 12-13. In this regard, the protester points to its notional timeline, which, in DCS's view, explains how it would enhance existing data exchanges. See AR, Tab 51, DCS's Technical Quotation at 15. However, the record does not support the protester's conclusions. Indeed, the agency's underlying evaluation explains the Air Force did examine DCS's notional timeline but found that the items included did not concern the development of data exchanges. AR, Tab 72, Post-Corrective Action Consensus Evaluation Document at 8 ("In the Offeror's presentation [21:20] and Slide 15, they discuss their Notional Timeline to achieve the following features[.]" but the "Government finds the items discussed above are not the development of data exchanges."). While DCS may disagree with the Air Force's assessment, without more, the protester's argument provides no basis for our Office to conclude the agency's evaluation judgments were unreasonable. *DEI Consulting, supra*.

Next, the protester also contests the agency's negative finding under the mission planning modernization subfactor. As the solicitation explained, the Air Force identified two key challenges with its transition to a cloud-based application: breaking monolithic services into microservices; and going from locally run applications to cloud-based applications. AR, Tab 46, IFPQ at 16. For each, vendors were to "discuss the technical aspects of the challenges to the Mission Planning Enterprise and approaches to overcome these challenges." *Id.* The Air Force would evaluate the "completeness and soundness of the discussion of the challenges" and the "quality and effectiveness of the approach and extent to which it overcomes the challenges." AR, Tab 42, Evaluation Criteria at 6.

The agency assessed one negative finding to DCS's quotation under this subfactor, for the firm's "identification of only one technical aspect in its discussion of transition to the

cloud.” AR, Tab 72, Post-Corrective Action Consensus Evaluation Document at 12. Specifically, the Air Force noted that DCS presented a chart of technical aspects and “discussed the challenge of going from a locally run application to a cloud-based application” in three specific points: (1) greater consistency of data and a more secure method of sharing data with the tradeoff of maintaining the integrity of the data; (2) large daily impact to other services in the system; and (3) cybersecurity, quality and code coverage automated through the build pipeline. *Id.* at 14; see also AR, Tab 51, DCS’s Technical Quotation at 28.

While the Air Force agreed that point three was a technical aspect of the challenge of moving from a local based to a cloud-based service, the first two were not. AR, Tab 72, Post-Corrective Action Consensus Evaluation Document at 14-15 (explaining that DCS’s first point “is not a technical aspect of the challenge of moving a set of software in a locally run application to a cloud-based application” but instead “describes technical aspects of being in the cloud environment, after the Government has done the transition to a cloud-based environment.” Concerning DCS’s second point, the Air Force explained it was a “technical difficulty with being in a cloud-based environment, and again, this is not a technical aspect of moving from a locally run application to a cloud based application.”). The agency evaluators concluded that DCS’s “identification of only one technical aspect demonstrates an incomplete assessment and discussion of the challenge and reflects a lack of knowledge.” *Id.* at 15.

As noted above, our Office will not reevaluate quotations but rather will examine the record to determine whether the agency’s evaluation conclusions were reasonable and consistent with the terms of the solicitation and applicable procurement laws and regulations. *OPTIMUS Corp.*, *supra* at 4. Here, we find nothing objectionable in the Air Force’s evaluation under this subfactor, as the evaluators reasonably determined that only one element identified by DCS concerns the challenges of moving to a cloud-based system. AR, Tab 72, Post-Corrective Action Consensus Evaluation Document at 12-14. Moreover, while DCS, in its protest pleadings, points to other portions of its technical quotation as satisfying the RFQ’s requirements, we agree with the Air Force that the record does not support the protester’s claims. See COS at 34-36 (explaining how DCS’s quotation references actually refer to code development, and not the transition to the cloud). The protester’s disagreement with the agency’s judgment, without more, does not establish that the evaluation was unreasonable. *DEI Consulting*, *supra*.

The protest is denied.

Edda Emmanuelli Perez
General Counsel