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# Decision

**Matter of:** DarkStar Intelligence, LLC

**File:** B-423966

**Date:** January 26, 2026

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Edward J. Tolchin, Esq., Offit Kurman, Attorneys-at-Law, for the protester.  
Christopher R. Shiplett, Esq., Randolph Law, PLLC, for Strategic Alliance Business Group, the intervenor.  
Colonel Nina R. Padalino, Aaron J. Weaver, Esq., Lawrence M. Anderson, Esq., and Blaine E. Beckstrom, Esq., Department of the Air Force, for the agency.  
Glenn G. Wolcott, Esq., and April Y. Shields, Esq., Office of the General Counsel, GAO, participated in the preparation of the decision.

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## DIGEST

Protest is denied where agency’s evaluation of awardee’s proposal was reasonable and consistent with the terms of the solicitation, and the agency reasonably concluded that the technical superiority of the awardee’s proposal offset its higher price.

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## DECISION

DarkStar Intelligence, LLC, of Woodbridge, Virginia, protests the Department of the Air Force’s issuance of a task order to Strategic Alliance Business Group (SABG), of Fairfax, Virginia, pursuant to fair opportunity proposal request (FOPR) No. FA2518-25-R-0033, to provide advisory and assistance services “for Space Electromagnetic Warfare (SEW), Space Domain Awareness (SDA), and Orbital Warfare (OW) forces to perform USSF [United States Space Force] missions.”<sup>1</sup> FOPR at 19. DarkStar challenges the agency’s assessment of a strength in SABG’s proposal based on

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<sup>1</sup> The solicitation further states that “[t]he SEW mission area . . . is dependent on inputs from Space Domain Awareness (SDA)” and elaborates that “SEW operations include: protective and defensive measures to ensure friendly forces can continuously conduct space operations across the entire spectrum of conflict; and operations to deceive, disrupt, deny, degrade, or destroy adversary space capabilities.” Agency Report (AR), Tab 8, FOPR at 19. (The page numbers referenced in this decision are the Adobe PDF page numbers in the documents submitted.)

SABG's proposal of an "enhancement/innovation," complaining that "[p]roposing an enhancement/innovation was not a[n evaluation] factor." Protest at 4.

We deny the protest.

## BACKGROUND

On June 6, 2025, pursuant to Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) subpart 16.5, the Air Force issued the solicitation to service-disabled veteran-owned small business (SDVOSB) concerns holding General Services Administration (GSA) One Acquisition Solution for Integrated Services Plus (OASIS+) indefinite-delivery, indefinite-quantity contracts. The solicitation provided that a task order would be issued to the offeror "whose proposal is considered to provide the best value to the Government by meeting or exceeding PWS [performance work statement] requirements" and established two evaluation factors: technical capability and price. FOPR at 11. The solicitation provided that the technical capability factor was "significantly more important" than price. *Id.* at 3.

Under the technical capability factor, the solicitation established three subfactors: staffing/management plan; technical approach; and transition. *Id.* at 7-8. Of relevance here, the solicitation provided that the technical approach subfactor was the most important subfactor and would be considered in the tradeoff; under the technical approach subfactor, proposals would be subjectively evaluated and assigned adjectival ratings of outstanding, good, acceptable, marginal, or unacceptable.<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at 12-13.

Of relevance here, a rating of "good" was defined as applicable to a "proposal [that] indicates a thorough approach and understanding of the requirements and contains at least one strength." *Id.* at 13. In turn, a "strength" was defined as "an aspect of an Offeror's proposal that has merit or exceeds specified performance or capability requirements in a way that will be advantageous to the Government[.]" *Id.*

Finally, the solicitation provided that, under the technical approach subfactor, the agency would "evaluate the extent to which the Offeror's proposal demonstrates an understanding of the requirements and approach to supporting PWS paragraphs 5.1.1, 5.2.1, 5.2.2, 5.2.3, and 5.8." *Id.* at 12. In this context, PWS paragraph 5.2.1, titled "SDA [space domain awareness] Sensor Focus Area," provided that the contractor's required support extends to "ground-based SDA sensors . . . Allied SDA sensors . . . and commercial SDA sensor integration." *Id.* at 24. This PWS paragraph also provides that the contractor will provide administrative support as the government's "SDA weapons system subject matter expert" and "aid . . . in identifying gaps in the SDA mission area." *Id.* at 24-25.

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<sup>2</sup> The solicitation further provided that, under the first and third subfactors (staffing/management plan and transition), proposals would be evaluated on an acceptable/unacceptable basis. *Id.* at 12.

On or before the July 17 solicitation closing date, proposals were submitted by eight offerors, including DarkStar and SABG.<sup>3</sup> Thereafter, the agency conducted interchanges and received proposal revisions; the revised proposals were evaluated as follows:

	Staffing/Management Plan	Technical Approach	Transition	Price
SABG	Acceptable	Good	Acceptable	\$28,803,354
DarkStar	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	\$26,029,191

AR, Tab 26, Fair Opportunity Decision Document (FODD) at 19.

In assigning a rating of good to SABG’s proposal under the technical approach subfactor, the agency identified a strength related to SABG’s proposed approach to performing the requirements under PWS paragraph 5.2.1, titled “SDA Sensor Focus Area.” Specifically, SABG proposed an “Accelerated Ops Integration Approach for Non-Traditional Sources” that provides “guidance and direction to international and commercial partners,” along with a “Sensor Optimization Process” that provides “resource prioritization across the network,” see AR, Tab 9, SABG Proposal at 39-40; the agency stated that it “expect[s] [these aspects of SABG’s proposal] to be advantageous to the Government during contract performance.” FODD at 7. More specifically, the agency’s evaluation documentation explained that “[a]s senior leaders . . . increasingly request integration of foreign and commercial sensors into the Space Surveillance Network (SSN), the ability to prioritize and advocate for the best available sources reduces timelines to operationalize and promote cost savings to the Government.” *Id.* The agency summarized the advantage offered by these aspects of SABG’s proposal, stating:

Currently SpOC [Space Operations Command] [redacted]. By SABG proposing a new accelerated process to prioritize foreign and commercial sensors, it would not only save time to integrate these sensors, but it would also save dollars and months/years to integrate those sensors into the SSN. It could also reduce manpower needed to conduct this analysis and potentially save the Government billions of dollars during the procurement of new weapon systems. . . . [Implementation of] a process to prioritize and accelerate integration, will increase SDA capabilities to the warfighter by focusing on those sensors that effectively close gaps in the SDA mission area.

*Id.*

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<sup>3</sup> The other proposals are not relevant to this protest and are not further discussed.

Based on SABG's higher-rated, higher-priced proposal, the agency performed a tradeoff between DarkStar's and SABG's proposals and determined that SABG's proposal offered the best value, stating:

DarkStar's bid offered \$2M[illion] cost savings over SABG. However, SABG's "Good" technical rating indicates a thorough approach and understanding of the requirements which will be advantageous to the Government. SABG's proposed innovative "Accelerated Ops Integration" and "Sensor Optimization Process" are designed to deliver significant advantages to the Government by prioritizing foreign/commercial sensors through an accelerated process [and] boosts analysis efficiency, yielding time, cost, and manpower savings.

*Id.* at 19-20.

On September 19, DarkStar was notified that SABG's proposal had been selected for issuance of the task order; after a debriefing, this protest followed.<sup>4</sup>

## DISCUSSION

First, DarkStar challenges the agency's assessment of a strength in SABG's proposal flowing from SABG's proposal of an "enhancement/innovation" related to PWS paragraph 5.2.1. Protest at 4. DarkStar complains that "[p]roposing an enhancement/innovation was not a[n evaluation] factor" and, thus, reflected application of undisclosed evaluation criteria.<sup>5</sup> *Id.* DarkStar also asserts that the agency's evaluation and best-value determination were inadequately supported because the agency "failed to evaluate [] the dollar value" of the benefits flowing from SABG's approach or "compare[] benefits provided by DarkStar to those from SABG." *Id.*; Comments at 4.

The agency responds that: the solicitation expressly advised offerors that, in evaluating proposals under the technical approach subfactor, the agency would assign "strengths" where a proposal "has merit *or exceeds specified performance or capability requirements*" (emphasis added); SABG's proposed approach to accelerating the integration of foreign and commercial sensors into the SSN exceeded the solicitation requirements in a way advantageous to the government; and SABG's approach will "save dollars and months/years," replacing an alternative process that could "cost in

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<sup>4</sup> The task order, which was issued under GSA's OASIS+ governmentwide acquisition contract, is valued at \$28,803,354; accordingly, this protest is within our jurisdiction to hear protests of task orders placed under civilian agency indefinite-delivery, indefinite-quantity contracts valued in excess of \$10 million. 41 U.S.C. § 4106(f)(1)(B).

<sup>5</sup> Similarly, DarkStar refers to the specific task requirements identified in PWS paragraph 5.2.1, again complaining that this particular paragraph "did not seek enhancements." Protest at 4.

excess of millions of dollars.”<sup>6</sup> Memorandum of Law (MOL) at 7-9; see FOPR at 13; FODD at 7. With regard to the best-value determination, the agency notes that it considered time, manpower, and cost savings related to specific aspects of this procurement, as well as potential future savings in other procurements and, accordingly, made a reasonable determination that SABG’s proposal offered the best value to the government. MOL at 10-13. In short, the agency maintains that its evaluation of SABG’s proposal and best-value determination were reasonable and consistent with the terms of the solicitation. We agree with the agency.

The evaluation of proposals in a task order competition conducted pursuant to FAR subpart 16.5 is primarily a matter within the contracting agency’s discretion because the agency is responsible for defining its needs and the best method of accommodating them. *CACI, Inc.-Fed.*, B-420441.3, Nov. 5, 2022, 2022 CPD ¶ 278 at 6. When reviewing protests challenging the issuance of a task order, 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’s evaluation criteria and applicable procurement laws and regulations. See, e.g., *DynCorp Int’l LLC*, B-411465, B-411465.2, Aug. 4, 2015, 2015 CPD ¶ 228 at 7. While a solicitation must inform offerors of the basis for proposal evaluation by identifying the evaluation factors and their relative importance, a solicitation need not specifically identify each and every element an agency considers during an evaluation where such elements are intrinsic to, or reasonably subsumed within, the stated evaluation factors. FAR § 16.505(b)(1)(iv)(C); see *Horizon Indus., Ltd.*, B-416222, B-416222.2, July 11, 2018, 2018 CPD ¶ 235 at 6. A protester’s disagreement with an agency’s judgments, by itself, is insufficient to establish that the agency acted unreasonably. *CACI, Inc.-Fed.*, *supra*.

With regard to a best-value determination in a task order procurement, the selection official must perform a price/technical tradeoff; that is, determine whether one proposal’s technical superiority is worth its higher price. *Lumen Techs. Gov’t Sols., Inc.*, B-420945 *et al.*, Nov. 16, 2022, 2022 CPD ¶ 301 at 13. An agency has broad discretion in making a tradeoff between price and non-price factors, and the extent to which one may be sacrificed for the other is governed only by the tests of rationality and consistency with the solicitation’s stated evaluation criteria. *CACI, Inc.-Fed.*, *supra* at 12. Finally, an agency’s documentation supporting its tradeoff need only establish that the agency was aware of the relative merits and costs of the competing proposals and that the source selection decision was reasonably based. *Ironclad Tech. Servs., LLC*, B-419976.2, May 2, 2022, 2022 CPD ¶ 104 at 5.

Here, as discussed above, the solicitation expressly provided for assessments of strengths, along with higher adjectival ratings, for proposals that exceeded the solicitation’s stated requirements. Further, the agency’s evaluation record contains

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<sup>6</sup> The agency also notes that, in other procurements for acquisition of new weapons systems, this aspect of SABG’s proposal could “potentially save the Government billions of dollars.” FODD at 7.

ample explanation supporting the agency's assessment of the strength based on SABG's proposal to exceed the requirements of PWS paragraph 5.2.1 by prioritizing and accelerating the integration of foreign and commercial sensors into the surveillance network. In assessing the strength, the record also reflects the agency's consideration of potential time, manpower, and costs savings flowing from SABG's proposed approach. Thus, we reject DarkStar's complaint that the agency applied undisclosed evaluation criteria as the FOPR clearly permitted the agency to consider the degree to which SABG's proposal exceeded the minimum requirements and would better satisfy the agency's needs. The protester's disagreement with the agency's judgments is insufficient to establish that the evaluation was unreasonable.

Finally, the agency's best-value determination reflects the agency's recognition of SABG's higher price, weighing that against the potential benefits flowing from its technically superior proposal. Moreover, based on its clear awareness of the relative merits and costs of the competing proposals, the agency reasonably determined that SABG's proposal offered the best value to the government. On this record, DarkStar's protest complaints are without merit.

The protest is denied.

Edda Emmanuelli Perez  
General Counsel