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**Comptroller General
of the United States**

**United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548**

Decision

Matter of: SAMCO Antennas, Inc.

File: B-409121

Date: December 24, 2013

Don G. Sanford for the protester.
Sheryl L. Rakestraw, Esq., Department of the Interior, for the agency.
Jennifer D. Westfall-McGrail, Esq., and Edward Goldstein, Esq., Office of the
General Counsel, GAO, participated in the preparation of the decision.

DIGEST

Protest is denied where agency reasonably concluded that protester's product failed to satisfy solicitation's required salient characteristics.

DECISION

SAMCO Antennas, Inc., of Fort Worth, Texas, protests the failure of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to issue it an order under request for quotations (RFQ) No. G13PS00575, for Yagi antennas for geospatial operational environmental (GOE) satellites. The protester contends that the agency's evaluation of its quotation was unreasonable.

We deny the protest.

The antennas sought here are used to transmit hydrological data from collection sites, often located in remote back country, to GEO satellites, which then relay the data to USGS scientists. According to the agency, the antennas are a critical component of field data transmission systems and have been procured by the agency and used by USGS scientists for decades.

The RFQ, as amended, sought quotations for a base quantity of 600 antennas, and two optional quantities of 400 antennas each. The solicitation identified the salient characteristics of the desired items.¹ Of relevance to this protest, two of the

¹ While the solicitation indicated that the antennas were sought on a brand name or equal basis, the RFQ did not identify a brand name item.

required characteristics were that the antenna “be easily assembled and disassembled for relocation” and that it “be self-contained, having minimum attached parts, external cables (other than pigtail) and minimum tuning adjustments.” RFQ at 4.

The RFQ provided for issuance of a purchase order to the vendor quoting the lowest price for a technically acceptable antenna. In this regard, quotations were evaluated using a three-step process. Under step 1, the agency evaluated vendor-completed salient characteristic checklists for compliance with the solicitation’s requirements. Under step 2, those vendors indicating compliance with all salient characteristics furnished product samples for testing to verify compliance with the stated characteristics. Under step 3, the agency evaluated prices to identify the lowest-priced technically acceptable quotation.

SAMCO and Sutron Corporation were among the vendors submitting quotations. Both passed the step 1 evaluation. As part of the step 2 evaluation, an agency technician assembled and mounted a sample antenna from each vendor. According to the agency, it took the technician approximately 45 minutes to assemble and mount the SAMCO antenna due to the large number of parts involved and the vague and incomplete instructions provided with the sample; he required substantially less time to assemble and mount the Sutron antenna. Agency Report at 3-4; Contracting Officer’s Statement of Facts at 4. The evaluators found SAMCO’s antenna unacceptable for failing to comply with the solicitation requirements for easy assembly/disassembly and minimal attached parts. As a consequence of the foregoing finding, the agency selected Sutron to receive the order despite its higher unit price. The agency issued an order to Sutron on September 18. SAMCO subsequently protested to our Office.

The protester argues that rather than relying on the results of a trial assembly to determine the amount of time required to assemble and mount its antenna, the agency should have distributed questionnaires to USGS personnel with experience performing antenna assemblies in the field and considered their feedback regarding the amount of time required for assembly. SAMCO further argues that it was unreasonable for the evaluators to place so much emphasis on assembly time. The protester maintains that the agency’s primary concern should be how well the antenna performs after installation, not how long assembly of the antenna takes. The protester notes in this connection that its antenna is designed to withstand the most rugged circumstances, and, as a consequence, may take longer to assemble.

Regarding the protester’s first complaint, a procuring agency enjoys a reasonable degree of discretion in determining whether a particular product meets the solicitation’s technical requirements as set forth in the salient characteristics, and we will not disturb the agency’s determination unless it is shown to be unreasonable. Beckman Coulter, Inc., B-405452, Nov. 4, 2011, 2011 CPD ¶ 231 at 5. The agency’s reasonable exercise of its discretion encompasses deciding how

to assess compliance with the required characteristics. Here, the agency evaluators decided that they would test compliance with the requirement for easy antenna assembly/disassembly by performing a trial assembly, a decision that was within their discretion and manifestly reasonable given, according to the agency, the time and expense that would have been required to collect data on assembly time using the approach proposed by the protester.

Regarding the protester's complaint that the agency placed too much emphasis on assembly time, the evaluators merely sought to verify that the antennas complied with the solicitation requirement for easy assembly and disassembly. While the protester may ultimately disagree with the agency's assessment of its antenna, such disagreement does not provide a basis to find the agency's evaluation unreasonable or otherwise sustain the protest. See Visual Connections, LLC, B-407625, Dec. 31, 2012, 2013 CPD ¶ 18 at 4 (mere disagreement with the agency's conclusions does not render the evaluation unreasonable).

The protest is denied.

Susan A. Poling
General Counsel