



Decision

Matter of: The i4 Group Consulting, LLC

File: B-418842

Date: August 11, 2020

Charles Maddox, The i4 Group Consulting, LLC, for the protester.
Alexis J. Bernstein, Esq., Josephine Farinelli, Esq., Kyle E. Gilbertson, Esq., and Allison Johnson, Esq., Department of the Air Force, for the agency.
Christine Milne, Esq., and Tania Calhoun, Esq., Office of the General Counsel, GAO, participated in the preparation of the decision.

DIGEST

Protest that the agency improperly evaluated the protester's quotation as technically unacceptable is denied where the record shows that the evaluation was reasonable in light of the protester's failure to submit an adequately written quotation.

DECISION

The i4 Group Consulting, LLC, a small business of Allen, Texas, protests the award of a contract to FWDthink, Inc., of Washington, D.C., also a small business, under request for quotations (RFQ) No. 1430658, issued by the Department of the Air Force for virtual training courses. The protester argues that the agency improperly evaluated its quotation as technically unacceptable, and that the awardee offers less experience at a higher price.

We deny the protest.

BACKGROUND

On May 19, 2020, pursuant to Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) parts 8 and 12, the agency issued the RFQ for the procurement of two separate, two-day virtual Scale Agile Framework (SAFE) training courses to be provided over a 1-year base period with no option periods. Agency Report (AR), Tab 4, RFQ at 1; Contracting Officer's Statement (COS) at 2. The virtual training was to provide current lifecycle "agile" and "waterfall" methodology training for project management for engineering and testing offices located at Maxwell Air Force Base in Gunter Annex, Alabama; Eglin Air Force Base, Florida; Fort Huachuca, Arizona; the Washington D.C. National Capital Region; and other

locations within the continental United States. RFQ at 1; COS at 1. Award was to be made to the lowest-priced, technically acceptable quotation. RFQ at 1. The RFQ also provided that the agency reserved the right to make award without conducting discussions. *Id.*

On May 26, the agency received nine quotations in response to the RFQ. COS at 3. The agency found that four of the nine were technically unacceptable, including i4's quotation, and the remaining five were technically acceptable, including FWDthink's quotation. AR, Tab 7, Technical Evaluation at 1-3; COS at 3. The agency found i4's quotation technically unacceptable because it made no mention of virtual training--a critical component of the requirement--as opposed to any other type of training. The quotation also included language that indicated i4 might intend to offer in-person training, such as provisions involving reimbursement for travel expenses. AR, Tab 7, Technical Evaluation at 1-3; COS at 4. The lowest-priced technically acceptable quotation was submitted by FWDthink, and award was made to the firm for \$25,000. AR, Tab 7, Technical Evaluation at 1-3; COS at 3. i4 was notified of the award on June 15, and this protest followed.

DISCUSSION

i4 argues that its quotation should not have been evaluated as technically unacceptable because it met the requirement of offering virtual training and offered the greatest expertise for the lowest price. Protest at 1. Specifically, i4 asserts that the agency should have assumed that its quotation was describing virtual training because it was responding to a quotation calling for virtual training; virtual training is the only type of training possible because of the global spread of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19); and i4's level of experience implies that it would be offering virtual training. Comments at 2. Lastly, i4 asserts that if the agency had any doubts about the nature of the training it was offering, it should have at least engaged in discussions with i4 or reviewed i4's website. *Id.* at 3.

The agency explains that i4's quotation did not demonstrate that i4 was actually offering virtual training because there was no reference to virtual training of any kind and, indeed, the word "virtual" appears nowhere in its quotation. AR, Tab 7, Technical Evaluation at 2-3. The agency also noted that i4's quotation did not explain any methods or plans of delivering virtual training. AR, Tab 11, Email From i4 Re RFQ at 1. The agency further states that there was language in i4's quotation that implied it might intend to offer in-person training.¹ AR, Tab 7, Technical Evaluation at 2-3. The agency

¹ i4's quotation provided that "[i]f applicable, travel expenses will be billed to and reimbursed by the client separately. Reimbursable expenses include the following: flight, lodging, taxi fees, and parking." AR, Tab 5, i4 Group Consulting, LLC, Proposal at 8. While i4 argues that the qualifier "if applicable" indicates that the language following it may not apply to this solicitation and therefore the agency should not have interpreted it as indicating that i4 might be offering in-person training, the agency had no

adds that the RFQ had no experience requirement whatsoever, and therefore the agency was not required to consider any vendor's experience during the evaluation. RFQ at 1. Finally, the agency also points out that the solicitation expressly provided that the agency reserved the right to make award without discussions and therefore the agency was simply not required to ask i4 anything about its quotation or consult outside information like the firm's website to clarify the protester's quotation. *Id.*

An offeror has the burden of submitting an adequately written proposal, and it runs the risk that its proposal will be evaluated unfavorably when it fails to do so. *Cambridge Project Development, Inc.*, B-409451, Apr. 29, 2014, 2014 CPD ¶ 136. We have reviewed the i4 quotation and find no basis to disagree with the agency's evaluation. In our view, it was not unreasonable for the agency to expect vendors to ensure that their quotations at least indicate that they will provide virtual training when the subject of the solicitation is virtual training. Here, i4 bore the risk that by not specifically referencing virtual training and by drafting its quotation to include language that would only apply to in-person training, the agency would evaluate its quotation as technically unacceptable. i4 chose not to incorporate responsive language that addressed the requirements of the RFQ, and therefore the agency reasonably found its quotation technically unacceptable. Finally, we agree with the agency that it was not required to look outside the quotation at the firm's website, and was not required to conduct discussions.² See *United Marine International LLC*, B-281512, Feb. 22, 1999, 99-1 CPD ¶ 44.

The protest is denied.

Thomas H. Armstrong
General Counsel

way of knowing what i4's intentions were based on the quotation's failure to state that the training would be virtual in nature.

² To the extent that i4 maintains that FWDthink is not qualified, the protester is not an interested party to challenge the award because the agency reasonably found i4's quotation unacceptable, and there are other acceptable quotations i4 has not challenged. 4 C.F.R. §§ 21.0(a)(1), 21.1; *NCS Technologies, Inc.*, B-416936, Jan. 11, 2019, 2019 CPD ¶ 56.