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# Decision

**Matter of:** IAP Worldwide Services, Inc.

**File:** B-419647; B-419647.3

**Date:** June 1, 2021

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## DIGEST

1. Protest challenging the evaluation of the protester's proposal as technically unacceptable for failing to adequately address material performance requirements is denied because the record reflects that the agency's evaluation was reasonable and in accordance with the terms of the solicitation.

2. In Department of Defense procurement valued in excess of \$100 million, agency's decision not to conduct discussions was reasonable where the record supports the agency's determination that award on the basis of initial proposals was in the government's best interest.

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## DECISION

IAP Worldwide Services, Inc., of Cape Canaveral, Florida, protests the award of a contract to Vectrus Systems Corporation, of Colorado Springs, Colorado, under request for proposals (RFP) No. W91RUS19R0018, which was issued by the Department of the Army, Army Contracting Command, for operation and maintenance services in support of the Army Operational Base Communications Information Systems and its infrastructure in support of United States Central Command forces in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Jordan. IAP challenges the agency's evaluation of proposals, and decision to make award without conducting discussions.

We deny the protest.

## BACKGROUND

The RFP, which was issued on April 3, 2019, and subsequently amended 8 times, sought proposals for operations and maintenance support of U.S. government owned or leased telecommunications equipment and information systems under the operational purview of the Network Enterprise Technology Command, 160th Signal Brigade and its subordinate units in the Southwest Asia and Central Asia theaters of operation. Agency Report (AR), Tab 7, RFP, amend. No. 3, Performance Work Statement (PWS), ¶¶ C.2.0. The RFP contemplated the award of a cost-plus-fixed-fee contract, with two, 60-day phase-in periods, an 8-month base period, and four, 1-year option periods. AR, Tab 4, RFP, ¶¶ B.2.

Award was to be made on a best-value tradeoff basis, considering the following evaluation factors: (1) mission support/technical approach; (2) past performance; (3) cost; and (4) small business participation. AR, Tab 4, RFP, ¶¶ M.1.A. The mission support/technical approach factor was more important than the past performance factor; the past performance factor was more important than cost; and cost was more important than small business participation. *Id.* The non-cost factors, when combined, were significantly more important than cost. *Id.*

Additionally, the mission support/technical approach factor included four subfactors: (i) management; (ii) technical; (iii) property management; and (iv) quality control. *Id.*, ¶¶ M.3. Among the subfactors, management was more important than technical, and technical was more important than property management and quality control. *Id.* Relevant here, the RFP provided that an offeror with individual subfactor ratings of less than “acceptable” for the management or technical subfactors, or “pass” for the property management or quality control subfactors would not move forward in the source selection process, and would not be considered for award. *Id.*, ¶¶ M.4. The RFP directed offerors to clearly demonstrate their ability to meet all of the RFP’s requirements, and warned offerors that failure to furnish full and complete information demonstrating the offeror’s ability to satisfy the specified requirements could cause the offer to be considered unacceptable, and, therefore, ineligible for award. *Id.*

The RFP further directed that, in accordance with Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) clause 52.215-1, the Army intended to make an award without discussions, but reserved the right to hold discussions, if necessary. Because deficiencies could only be corrected through discussions, the RFP cautioned offerors “to examine this solicitation in its entirety and to ensure that their proposal[s] contain[ ] all necessary information, provide[ ] all required documentation, and [are] complete in all respects.” AR, Tab 8, RFP, amend. No. 4, ¶¶ L.5.1; *see also* AR, Tab 4, RFP, ¶¶ M.1.A and M.5 (reiterating that the Army intended to make award without conducting discussions).

As addressed herein, only the technical subfactor under the mission support/technical approach evaluation factor is relevant for the resolution of this protest. With respect to this subfactor, the RFP required offerors to address three elements. First, offerors were

required to describe their proposed technical approach for performing the PWS's technical requirements, including:

- Capability to support the layered defense of the Army network;
- Capability to support operating, maintaining, and defending the following: United States Army Regional Cyber Center-Southwest Asia, regional network operations and security center (RNOSC), post/camp/station (P/C/S) support, communication support services, telephone, inside plant/outside plant, and cable transmission services supporting the theater logistics support facility functions;
- Capability to support the existing and emerging communications systems and facilities; and
- Understanding of the technical requirements to provide support for the PWS's identified services, and its ability to plan, organize, implement, sustain, and adapt to changing environments in response to the PWS's specifications.

AR, Tab 8, RFP, amend. No. 4, ¶ L.8.2.B.1.

Second, offerors were required to demonstrate their capability to staff the effort. To aid offerors, the RFP incorporated as attachments government estimated staffing and workload data information. Offerors were directed to “refrain from merely mimicking the estimated manning,” and instead to “propose an innovative staffing solution based off workload data.” *Id.*, ¶ L.8.2.B.2. Offerors were required to provide an overall staffing structure and staffing levels by site based on their proposed technical solution, including a staffing worksheet with the following information for each labor category proposed:

- Specific job title (e.g., Help Desk Specialist I, II, III, IV);
- Part time/full time position;
- Total hours per week;
- Work days (e.g., Monday-Friday, Tuesday-Saturday);
- Employee Duty Hours (e.g., 0830–1630); and
- Recommended fill rate at full performance start date, and plan to maintain the resources through the life of the contract.

*Id.*

Third, offerors were to provide descriptions of the qualification requirements for their proposed labor categories that were in line with the qualification requirements needed to support the PWS's technical requirements. Specifically, offerors were to identify the

qualifications, types of experience, education, training and certifications for each labor category they proposed. Offerors were required to provide the following information in the specified format for each proposed labor category:

<b>Job Title/ Labor Category</b>	<b>Security Clearance</b>	<b>Experience &amp; Education</b>	<b>Skill Set Certifications(s)</b>	<b>Training Required</b>	<b>IT/IAT/IAM/Other Certification(s) and Level<sup>1</sup></b>

*Id.*, L.8.2.B.3.

The Army was to assess the offeror’s proposed technical approach for performing the PWS’s technical requirements, including whether the offeror demonstrated an understanding of the requirement to provide support for the identified services. AR, Tab 4, RFP, ¶ M.4.c.

The Army ultimately received five proposals in response to the RFP, including from IAP and Vectrus. AR, Tab 41, Source Selection Decision, at 5-6. Relevant here, the Source Selection Authority (SSA) evaluated the final proposals of IAP and Vectrus as follows:

<b>Factor/Subfactor</b>	<b>IAP</b>	<b>Vectrus</b>
Mission Support/Technical Approach	Unacceptable	Outstanding
Subfactor 1 – Management	Good	Outstanding
Subfactor 2 – Technical	Unacceptable	Good
Subfactor 3 – Property Management	Pass	Pass
Subfactor 4 – Quality Control	Pass	Pass
Past Performance		
Relevancy	Very Relevant	Very Relevant
Performance Confidence Assessment	Substantial Confidence	Substantial Confidence
Total Evaluated Price	\$776,954,538	\$1,027,490,421
Small Business Participation	Good	Acceptable

*Id.* at 6.

As discussed below, the SSA agreed with the lower-level evaluators’ assessment of a deficiency in IAP’s proposal for failing to adequately propose an approach to providing outside plant support in Iraq in accordance with PWS ¶ C.3.7.2. *Id.* at 7. The SSA then

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<sup>1</sup> The above acronyms relate to information technology (IT), information assurance technical (IAT), and information assurance management (IAM). See AR, Tab 4, RFP, ¶ L.8.2(B)(3).

proceeded to review the evaluated strengths and weaknesses for the remaining four technically acceptable offers, including IAP's proposal which the SSA found offered a "clear differentiation" under the most important management and technical subfactors. *Id.*; see also *id.* at 11-14 (setting forth basis for tradeoff decision). The SSA elected to make the award decision on the basis of the four technically acceptable initial proposals without conducting discussions because the SSA concluded that, in light of the clear differentiation among the technically acceptable proposals, discussions "would not result in any meaningful benefit to the Government, or any changes to the apparent outcome of the source selection decision." *Id.* at 11. Following the completion of an enhanced debriefing, IAP filed this protest.

## DISCUSSION

IAP raises a number of challenges to the agency's evaluation of proposals and resulting award decision. The protester first contends that the agency unreasonably evaluated IAP's proposal, arguing that the Army erred by assessing its proposal with a deficiency and other weaknesses, and by failing to assign strengths for features of IAP's proposal that allegedly exceeded the solicitation's requirements. IAP alternatively argues the Army engaged in an unreasonable and unequal evaluation because the awardee's proposal similarly should have been evaluated as deficient. The protester further contends that the Army erred in making award without conducting discussions. As a result of these alleged errors, the protester contends that the resulting award decision was unreasonable. For the reasons that follow, we find no basis on which to sustain the protest.

### Assessed Deficiency

As noted above, the Army assessed IAP's technical approach with a deficiency because IAP's proposal failed to demonstrate an adequate approach to fulfilling the outside plant (OSP) service requirements in Iraq. Specifically, the Army found that IAP's proposal:

[D]oes not address the [OSP] technical requirement in PWS paragraph C.3.7.2, which supports all Iraq P/C/S. [IAP] proposed [DELETED] where [DELETED] are feasible. The lack of support for the OSP requirement creates a capability gap to support the OSP infrastructure at P/C/S level within Iraq. The lack of OSP support within Iraq is a deficiency because the proposal failed to provide OSP support in accordance with [RFP Technical Exhibit 2], which specifies current locations and systems to be supported. The Offeror's approach increases the risk of unsuccessful contract performance to an unacceptable level because—

1. The Offeror did not identify the [DELETED] would provide support.
2. Although the Offeror proposed that [DELETED] would provide the OSP support, the Offeror removed the [DELETED] at all locations in Iraq.

AR, Tab 45c, Source Selection Evaluation Board Rep., at 38 (internal citations to proposal omitted).

IAP objects to the assessed deficiency, arguing that the agency unreasonably evaluated the protester's proposed approach to fulfilling the OSP requirements in Iraq. Based on our review of the record, it is apparent that IAP's proposed approach to address the OSP services in Iraq is replete with inconsistencies and incomplete information. Therefore, as discussed below, we find no basis to sustain the protester's objections.

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. In a negotiated procurement, it is an offeror's responsibility to submit a well-written proposal, with adequately detailed information which clearly demonstrates compliance with the solicitation and allows a meaningful review by the procuring agency. *Applied Visual Tech., Inc.*, B-401804.3, Aug. 21, 2015, 2015 CPD ¶ 261 at 3; *ARBEiT, LLC*, B-411049, Apr. 27, 2015, 2015 CPD ¶ 146 at 4.

Relevant here, one of the PWS's enumerated technical requirements is for the contractor to provide OSP support. Specifically, the contractor will be responsible for maintaining, repairing, and testing customer equipment, and maintaining the OSP infrastructure, including: communications pathways; maintenance hole cabling and hand holes; duct systems; copper and fiber optic cabling; main distribution frame; terminations of copper and fiber optic cables; vaults; multiplexing equipment; cross connects system design; integration of systems to the OSP infrastructure; and quality assurance/quality control of the OSP system. AR, Tab 7, RFP, amend. No. 3, PWS, ¶ C.3.7.2.1.

As an example of their assigned responsibilities, OSP technicians will be responsible for: (i) installing, de-installing, maintaining, repairing, and testing multi-conductor aerial, underground, and buried multi-purpose communications cable to include coaxial, fiber optics, and copper/conventional cable; (ii) maintaining associated telephone poles, manholes, handholds, outside terminals, splice points, and bonding and grounding of termination points; and (iii) fabricating fiber optic, metallic, or coaxial cables. *Id.*, ¶ C.3.7.2.2. In order to fulfill these responsibilities, OSP technicians must be able to operate digger derricks, bucket trucks, personnel lifts, backhoes, and trenching equipment, and be qualified to splice fiber optic cable. *Id.* Additionally, OSP technicians will be required to conduct site surveys for service orders requiring new installation, obtain digger clearances before commencing excavation, and receiving, processing, coordinating, and recommending concurrence or non-concurrence for all digging permit requests. *Id.*, ¶¶ C.3.7.2.3 – C.3.7.2.5.

Specific to Iraq, the RFP required OSP technician support 10 hours a day, 6 days a week at 5 locations in the country. AR, Tab 7e, RFP, amend. No. 3, Revised Tech. Exh. 2, at cells A69:L69. The Army estimated that 12 full-time equivalents (FTE) would

be needed to provide the required services. AR, Tab 8a, RFP, amend. No. 4, attach. 8, Revised Staffing Estimate, at cells A:220-C:220, A:227-C:227, A:232-C:232, A:240-C:240, A:251-C:251, A:264-C:264.

In response to the PWS's overall requirements for inside plant (ISP) and OSP support, IAP explained that it "[DELETED] where [DELETED] make that practical." AR, Tab 16, IAP Tech. Proposal at Vol. 2 – 72; see also *id.* at Vol. 2- 73 ("Our plan is to [DELETED], and [DELETED], or as needed based on requirements regardless if they [DELETED]."). IAP further touted its approach to consolidating support, explaining that "[DELETED] consolidation of the [DELETED] from the [DELETED], [DELETED] consolidation of [DELETED] for most tasks, using available [DELETED], to vastly reduce [DELETED] requirements, and reduce risk of [DELETED]." *Id.*, at Vol. 2 – 84.

This leads to the first problem with IAP's proposed approach to the OSP requirements in Iraq. Although, IAP's technical narrative indicated that it would [DELETED], for Iraq, IAP proposed specific resources to perform OSP technician services at each of the 5 P/C/S locations in Iraq. See generally *id.*, Basis of Estimate (BOE), at 59-61.<sup>2</sup> Setting aside this inconsistency, there is a second problem with IAP's proposal on this point. IAP's technical narrative and accompanying staffing plan failed to provide detail about its supposed [DELETED] resources providing OSP services in Iraq. IAP's technical narrative did not identify who they are, where they are located, and how they will timely support all required on-site support.

There was also a fundamental disconnect between IAP's technical narrative and its staffing information regarding the type of personnel IAP intended to use to support the ISP/OSP requirements in Iraq. On the one hand, IAP's technical narrative generally indicated that it would use [DELETED] to fulfill OSP requirements, however, IAP's staffing information for Iraq instead identified local [DELETED] to provide the required services.

Specifically, IAP's technical narrative represented that it would fulfill OSP requirements using a team of OSP and/or ISP personnel:

*[W]e either staff [DELETED] personnel who have experience to reduce the amount of personnel or we combined [DELETED] personnel with [DELETED] where applicable. . . . At smaller locations we use [DELETED] to assist with work alongside the [DELETED] if maintenance or repairs require a [DELETED]-person team for safety.*

*Id.*, Vol. 2 – 72 (emphasis added).

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<sup>2</sup> References to the page numbers of IAP's BOE in its technical proposal are to the Adobe PDF pagination of the version produced with the agency report.

In Iraq, however, IAP did not propose any OSP or ISP technicians to perform the required OSP support. Rather, the protester proposed to assign locally based [DELETED] to perform the required OSP services.<sup>3</sup> See *generally id.*, at 59-61 (reflecting no FTEs proposed for OSP technicians, and that for the OSP technician labor category IAP was proposing a “job code override assignment” to [DELETED]). Given these inconsistencies, the Army was reasonably confused about how IAP intended to support the OSP requirements and with what resources. On one hand, IAP proposed centralized teams of ISP/OSP technicians to provide the required services. On the other hand, IAP proposed locally based [DELETED] for the required services in Iraq. These disconnects, alone, would support the Army’s evaluated concerns. The problems with IAP’s proposal do not end here, however. Further scrutiny of IAP’s proposal provides yet additional support for the agency’s assessed deficiency.

IAP’s proposal is devoid of any explanation for how [DELETED] are capable of performing the required OSP services. In this regard, IAP’s proposed labor category description for the OSP technician position included the following tasks: (1) maintain, repair, and test customer equipment and OSP infrastructure; (2) install, de-install, maintain, repair, and test multiple-conductor aerial, underground, and buried multipurpose communications cable to include coaxial, fiber optics, and copper/conventional cable; (3) operate digger derricks, bucket trucks, personnel lifts, backhoes, and trenching equipment; (4) conduct site surveys for service orders requiring new installation; and (5) correcting customer-generated cable-related trouble calls. *Id.*, BOE, at 183-184.

IAP also proposed specific education and experience requirements for its OSP technicians, including: (1) 2+ years field experience in OSP/lineman work; (2) telecommunication experience in OSP construction, buried, pedestal, towers, and aerial installation; (3) experience with installation, removal, and maintenance of OSP equipment; (4) experience performing site surveys; experience with fiber optic test and splicing equipment; (5) experience operating vehicle-mounted aerial device equipment; (6) experience operating cable lashing equipment and other lineman equipment; (7) ability to work construction in a physically demanding environment, including carrying heavy equipment and climbing ladders; and (8) the ability to carry 75-80 pounds. *Id.*

In contrast, IAP’s proposed labor category description for the [DELETED] position include the following tasks: (1) operate the customer support help and work desk; (2) collect required work request forms and maintain a file of all completed services orders; (3) ensure technicians properly complete work requests; (4) ensure minimum data requirements are entered into the work order; (5) provide customers with an

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<sup>3</sup> Iraq was the only country where IAP proposed to have [DELETED] supported by [DELETED] perform OSP tasks. In this regard, for all locations in Afghanistan, Kuwait, Qatar, and UAE, IAP proposed to provide the required OSP technician services through OSP or ISP technicians. See *generally* AR, Tab 16, IAP Tech. Proposal, BOE, at 52-72.



acknowledgement and resolution of work, or path to thereof; and (6) contact the customer to report the act of remediation and allow the customer to confirm restored operation prior to closure of the ticket. *Id.*, 246-247.

IAP proposed specific education and experience requirements for its [DELETED], including: (1) experience using [DELETED] to manage [DELETED] from start until [DELETED]; (2) ability to [DELETED], follow [DELETED], and have an understanding of how to [DELETED]; (3) strong [DELETED] skills; (4) experience with [DELETED] such as [DELETED]; (5) ability to act as the focal point for [DELETED] and [DELETED], perform [DELETED], and assign [DELETED]; and (6) ability to facilitate [DELETED] throughout the [DELETED] process. *Id.*

As reflected above, an OSP technician--a construction and physical maintenance position--and a [DELETED]--an information technology position-- are fundamentally different, with unique responsibilities and education/experience requirements. Nothing in IAP's proposal explains how it will ensure that its [DELETED] in Iraq will be qualified to provide the services contemplated under and satisfy the unique education/experience requirements of both positions.

In addition to failing to explain how [DELETED] would be qualified to fulfill the disparate job responsibilities and satisfy the OSP technician's minimum qualifications, the proposal does not address how the [DELETED] will be able to simultaneously provide both help desk and OSP support. In this regard, in addition to anticipating 12 FTEs for OSP technicians in Iraq, the RFP's staffing estimate also anticipated 21 FTEs for help desk support in the country. See AR, Tab 8a, amend. No. 3, Revised Attach. 8, Staffing Estimate, at cells A:218-C:218, A:225-C:225, A:230-C:230, A:238-C:238, A:240-C:240, A:261-C:261. Thus, the RFP's staffing estimate for both OSP and help desk support in Iraq was 33 FTEs.

IAP's proposed staffing of [DELETED] in Iraq--who would support both help desk and OSP requirements--ranged from a low of [DELETED] FTEs in the base period to a maximum of [DELETED] FTEs in the option periods. See AR, Tab 16, IAP Tech. Proposal, BOE, at 59-61. Setting aside IAP's failure to explain how [DELETED] will be qualified to perform OSP technician services generally, IAP's proposal also failed to address how less than [DELETED] of the FTEs anticipated for both help desk and OSP technician services could fully perform the anticipated workload of both services.

We also find no basis to object to the Army's evaluated concern with respect to IAP's proposed approach to utilize [DELETED] to support OSP technicians. As addressed above, IAP proposed that [DELETED] would "work alongside the [DELETED] if maintenance or repairs require a [DELETED]-person team for safety." *Id.*, at Vol. 2 – 72. IAP reiterated that this additional support for certain OSP work is important for safety reasons. *Id.* at Vol. 2- 73 ("OSP missions often require a larger work force for safety concerns, especially while operating heavy equipment and/or working in maintenance holes and other areas."). Notwithstanding this emphasis on

[DELETED] supporting safe OSP operations, IAP's staffing plan proposed to eliminate all [DELETED] in Iraq during the option years. *Id.*, BOE, at 59-61.

In lieu of providing [DELETED] at the five covered P/C/S in Iraq where OSP services are required, IAP proposes in the option years to assign [DELETED] services to [DELETED] located at the RNOSC. *Id.* Absent from the proposal, however, is any explanation regarding whether the [DELETED] will also provide support to the OSP technicians, and, if so, how and on what schedule the [DELETED] located at the RNOSC will support local requirements at the 5 P/C/S locations. Thus, on this record, we find nothing objectionable in the Army's evaluated concerns where IAP's proposal fails to adequately address the who, what, when, where, why, and how regarding its proposed approach to meeting the RFP's mandatory OSP support service requirements in Iraq.

IAP also argues that, even if the agency's assessed concerns were reasonable, the Army nonetheless erred in assigning a deficiency. In this regard, the protester contends that in light of the concern being limited to one PWS provision within only one covered region, the Army reasonably should have assessed its concerns as constituting only a weakness. We find no merit to these arguments, as they merely reflect the protester's disagreement with the weight assigned to the reasonably assessed concerns. *Undercover Training, LLC*, B-418170, Jan. 9, 2020, 2020 CPD ¶ 25 at 6; *Protection Strategies, Inc.*, B-416635, Nov. 1, 2018, 2019 CPD ¶ 33 at 7.

Clearly stated requirements within a solicitation are considered to be material to the needs of the government, and a proposal that fails to conform to the solicitation's material terms and conditions must be considered unacceptable and may not form the basis for award. *ARBEIT, LLC, supra*. As with other aspects of an evaluation, agencies have discretion to assess whether a failure meets the standard of materiality set forth in a solicitation, and our Office will not substitute our judgment for the agency's unless the record shows that the agency has acted unreasonably. *Enterprise Servs., LLC*, B-417329 *et al.*, May 30, 2019, 2019 CPD ¶ 205 at 10; *CACI Techs., Inc.*, B-408552, Nov. 1, 2013, 2013 CPD ¶ 255 at 9-10. On this record, we find that the Army reasonably evaluated IAP's proposal deficient with respect to its proposed approach to meet the mandatory OSP technician requirements in Iraq; the protester's disagreement with the weight assigned to the Army's reasonably assessed concerns, without more, fails to provide a basis on which we will disturb the agency's evaluation.

#### Decision Not to Conduct Discussions

Next, IAP protests that it was improper for the Army to make award to Vectrus without conducting discussions. In this regard, the protester refers to Defense Federal Acquisition Regulation Supplement (DFARS) section 215.306(c), which provides that "[f]or acquisitions with an estimated value of \$100 million or more, contracting officers should conduct discussions." Because this procurement has an estimated value in

excess of \$100 million, IAP maintains that the agency was required to conduct discussions.

The agency responds by first noting that the solicitation put offerors on notice of the agency's intent to make award without conducting discussions. AR, Tab 4, RFP, ¶¶ M.1.A and M.5; Tab 8, RFP, amend. No. 4, ¶ L.5.1. The agency further responds that its review of initial proposals demonstrated clear technical advantages and disadvantages that differentiated the proposals. In this regard, the Army received 5 proposals and, following evaluation, 4 proposals were determined to be technically acceptable with fair and reasonable total evaluated prices. See AR, Tab 45e, Source Selection Decision, at 5-6, 11-14. Further, Vectrus's proposal was the only proposal to receive the highest rating of outstanding under the RFP's most important evaluation factor, mission support/technical, and outstanding under the management subfactor, which was the most important mission support/technical subfactor. *Id.*

We have explained that, although DFARS section 215.306(c) establishes an expectation that discussions will be conducted in Department of Defense procurements valued over \$100 million, agencies retain the discretion not to conduct discussions based on the particular circumstances of each procurement. *Omni2H, LLC*, B-418655, July 16, 2020, 2020 CPD ¶ 239 at 6-7; *Science Applications Int'l Corp.*, B-413501, B-413501.2, Nov. 9, 2016, 2016 CPD ¶ 328 at 8-9. In this regard, we will review an agency's decision to forego discussions, taking into consideration various facts, including notification in the solicitation of that intent; existence of clear technical advantages/disadvantages in initial proposals; and submission of initial proposals offering fair and reasonable prices. *Novetta, Inc.*, B-414672.4, B-414672.7, Oct. 9, 2018, 2018 CPD ¶ 349 at 22-23. We have additionally recognized that an agency generally need not conduct discussions with a technically unacceptable offeror. *Chenega Healthcare Servs., LLC*, B-416158, June 4, 2018, 2018 CPD ¶ 200 at 5; *SOC LLC*, B-415460.2, B-415460.3, Jan. 8, 2018, 2018 CPD ¶ 20 at 8.

Here, we reject IAP's assertion that the agency was required to conduct discussions. As discussed above, the RFP *three times* clearly advised offerors that, while conducting discussions was an option, the Army intended to award without conducting discussions. Further, based on our review of the record, the agency reasonably concluded that the initial proposals demonstrated clear technical advantages and disadvantages between the competing proposals. Specifically, the Army received five proposals, four of which were technically acceptable with fair and reasonable pricing, and Vectrus's proposal offered unique strengths under the most important evaluation factor and the factor's corresponding most important subfactors. Finally, the agency reasonably found that IAP submitted a technically unacceptable proposal for failing to adequately address material solicitation requirements. On this record, we do not find that the agency's determination to award on the basis of initial proposals was unreasonable, and IAP's protest challenging that determination is denied.

## Remaining Protest Allegations

As explained above, the Army reasonably found IAP's proposal unacceptable and ineligible for award. AR, Tab 4, RFP, ¶ M.1.A. Although IAP raises other protest allegations challenging the evaluation of its proposal and Vectrus's proposal, we find that IAP is not an interested party to pursue those allegations. Under our Bid Protest Regulations, a party is not interested to maintain a protest if it would not be in line for award if the protest were sustained. 4 C.F.R. § 21.0(a), 21.1(a). In this regard, even if IAP were to prevail on the remainder of its challenges to the evaluation of its proposal and Vectrus's proposal, the protester would still not be next in line for award where (i) IAP's proposal would still be technically deficient and ineligible for award, and (ii) the Army received three additional, technically acceptable proposals in addition to Vectrus's proposal. See AR, Tab 45e, Source Selection Decision, at 5-6, 12-14. Thus, since the Army reasonably found IAP's proposal unacceptable and there are multiple intervening technically acceptable proposals, the protester is not an interested party for purposes of questioning the remainder of the agency's evaluation of proposals and resulting award decision. *Barbaricum, LLC*, B-418427.7, Dec. 11, 2020, 2020 CPD ¶ 41 at 5; *PAE Applied Techs., LLC*, B-419133, Nov. 4, 2020, 2020 CPD ¶ 363 at 10; *Tyonek Worldwide Servs., Inc.; DigiFlight, Inc.*, B-409326 *et al.*, Mar. 11, 2014, 2014 CPD ¶ 97 at 7, *recon. denied*, *Tyonek Worldwide Servs., Inc.--Recon.*, B-409326.6, May 16, 2014, 2014 CPD ¶ 156.

The protest is denied.

Thomas H. Armstrong  
General Counsel