



GAO

Accountability \* Integrity \* Reliability

Comptroller General  
of the United States

United States Government Accountability Office  
Washington, DC 20548

**DOCUMENT FOR PUBLIC RELEASE**

The decision issued on the date below was subject to a GAO Protective Order. This redacted version has been approved for public release.

## Decision

**Matter of:** Main Sail, LLC

**File:** B-412138; B-412138.2

**Date:** January 29, 2016

---

Steven J. Koprince, Esq., Matthew P. Moriarty, Esq., Matthew T. Schoonover, Esq., Koprince Law LLC, for the protester.

Cheryl R. Parker, Esq., and Robert Schlesinger, Esq., Department of the Navy, for the agency.

Brent Burris, Esq., and Edward Goldstein, Esq., Office of the General Counsel, GAO, participated in the preparation of the decision.

---

### DIGEST

Protest challenging agency's evaluation of proposals is denied where the record shows that the evaluation was reasonable and consistent with the terms of the solicitation.

---

### DECISION

Main Sail, LLC, a small business located in Cleveland, Ohio, protests the issuance of a task order to Cameron Bell Corporation d/b/a Government Solutions Group (GovSG), a small business located in Daniel Island, South Carolina, under request for proposals (RFP) No. N00024-15-R-3260, issued by the Department of the Navy, Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command (SPAWAR) for information technology support services. The protester challenges the Navy's evaluation of its technical and cost proposal as well as the evaluation of the awardee's technical proposal.

We deny the protest.

The RFP, issued on May 7, 2015 and set aside for small business concerns, provided for the issuance of a cost-plus-fixed-fee task order under the Navy's SeaPort Enhanced multiple-award, indefinite-delivery/indefinite-quantity (IDIQ)

contract program.<sup>1</sup> Contracting Officer's (CO's) Statement at 2. The RFP anticipated a task order with a base period and four 1-year options and sought contractor sustainment support for the Navy's enterprise business management software, known as Navy Enterprise Resource Planning (N-ERP). Id.

The RFP provided that selection would be made using a best-value tradeoff process considering cost and the following four non-cost evaluation factors: (1) technical/management capability; (2) organizational experience; (3) personnel qualifications; and (4) past performance.<sup>2</sup> RFP at 47-48. The technical/management capability factor was further divided into four subfactors (in descending order of importance): N-ERP sustainment, enterprise user life cycle management (eULMT), network administration, and program management. Id. at 47. With respect to the best-value tradeoff, the RFP provided that technical/management capability was the most important evaluation factor, organizational experience was the second most important, and personnel qualifications and past performance were of equal importance. Id. at 48. The RFP further provided that when combined, the non-cost factors were significantly more important than cost. Id.

As relevant here, the solicitation directed offerors to describe their proposed approach to meet each of the technical/management capability subfactors, and identified the sections of the performance work statement (PWS) relevant to each subfactor. Id. at 43. For example, under the N-ERP sustainment subfactor, offerors were to describe their proposed approach to creating, updating, and sustaining the processes, procedures, services, and tools necessary to support N-ERP version 1.1. The RFP also identified section 5.6 through 5.8 of the PWS tasks as relevant to this subfactor. Id. Under the technical/management capability factor, the RFP provided that the Navy would assess "the extent to which the Offeror's proposed technical approach is likely to meet PWS requirements, the degree to which it demonstrates technical understanding of each task and how the task relates to other tasks in the PWS." Id. at 48. Of note, the RFP limited offerors' proposal responses under the technical/management capability factor to eight pages. Id.

---

<sup>1</sup> The estimated value of the task order at issue exceeds \$10 million. Accordingly, this procurement is within our jurisdiction to hear protests related to the issuance of task orders under multiple-award IDIQ contracts. 10 U.S.C. § 2304c(e)(1)(B).

<sup>2</sup> For the non-cost factors and subfactors other than past performance, the agency rated proposals as outstanding, good, acceptable, marginal, or unacceptable. CO's Statement at 9-10. For past performance, the possible performance confidence assessment ratings were substantial confidence, satisfactory confidence, limited confidence, no confidence, or unknown confidence. Id. at 12.

With respect to the personnel qualifications factor, the RFP provided that the Navy would evaluate the extent to which offerors' proposed personnel demonstrated "the desired education, qualifications and experience to enable successful performance of the PWS requirements as described in RFP." Id. at 48. To facilitate the evaluation of this factor, the RFP directed offerors to submit resumes for nine specific positions using a template provided with the solicitation. Id. at 44. Of relevance to this protest, a proposed employee's eligibility to obtain a secret level security clearance was identified as a desired qualification for all of the labor categories contained in the RFP. RFP, Attachment 2.

As to the evaluation of cost, the RFP advised offerors that the Navy would conduct a cost realism evaluation and adjust offerors' proposed costs to the extent that the agency found them unrealistic. RFP at 49.

The Navy timely received proposals from two offerors, GovSG (the incumbent contractor) and Main Sail. CO's Statement at 13. The results of the agency's evaluation for the protester and awardee were as follows:

	Main Sail	GovSG
<b>Technical/Management Capability - Overall Rating</b>	Acceptable	Good
Subfactor 1 - N-ERP Sustainment	Acceptable	Good
Subfactor 2 - eULMT	Acceptable	Outstanding
Subfactor 3 - Network Administration	Marginal	Good
Subfactor 4 - Program Management	Marginal	Outstanding
<b>Organizational Experience</b>	Good	Outstanding
<b>Personnel Qualifications</b>	Acceptable	Outstanding
<b>Past Performance</b>	Substantial Confidence	Substantial Confidence
<b>Overall Rating</b>	Acceptable	Outstanding
<b>Total Evaluated Cost</b>	\$49,857,815	\$54,592,059

Id.

In evaluating Main Sail's proposal, the source selection evaluation board (SSEB) found the protester's technical and management approach acceptable overall, however, it concluded that in several areas the proposal lacked sufficient details regarding how the protester would address the PWS requirements. Agency Report (AR), exh. 5, SSEB Report, at 22-27. In this regard, the record reflects that the agency assigned Main Sail's proposal seven weaknesses and three significant weaknesses under the technical/management capability subfactors. Id.

By contrast, the SSEB found that GovSG's proposal demonstrated an exceptional approach and understanding of the PWS requirements, and assessed GovSG's technical proposal as having 20 strengths, 1 weakness, and no significant weaknesses or deficiencies under the technical/management capability subfactors. Id. at 8-14.

Regarding its evaluation of the personnel qualifications factor, the agency assigned Main Sail's proposal five weaknesses. Id. at 27-31. As relevant here, the agency assessed three of these weaknesses because the resumes for three of Main Sail's proposed employees did not indicate that the individuals had a current security clearance or the ability to achieve one. Id. at 30-31. The Navy assigned a fourth weakness due to the fact that one of Main Sail's proposed employees lived outside of the normal commuting area for the position at issue, which, in the agency's view, increased cost risk due to the potential need for the agency to pay travel-related costs. Id. at 31.

In performing its cost realism evaluation, the Navy made several upward adjustments to Main Sail's proposed costs, including increasing the proposed general and administrative costs rate for the protester and one of its subcontractors, as well as increasing some of the labor rates proposed by Main Sail's subcontractors. AR, exh. 9, Cost Evaluation Board Report. As a result of the Navy's cost realism analysis, the protester's total proposed cost of \$48,574,022 was upwardly adjusted by \$1,283,793. Id. at 39.

In conducting the best-value tradeoff analysis, the CO, who served as the source selection authority, observed that Main Sail's proposal offered a notable cost advantage over GovSG's proposal. AR, exh. 6, Source Selection Decision (SSD), at 25. The CO found, however, that this cost advantage was "significantly diminished by the considerable disparity and associated risks in the technical factor ratings." Id. The CO noted that GovSG received higher ratings than Main Sail in the three most important evaluation factors as well as higher ratings under each of the four technical/management capability subfactors. Id. at 25-26. Based on this disparity in ratings and the numerous additional strengths and lower risk of unsuccessful performance offered by GovSG's proposal, the CO concluded that award to GovSG represented the best value to the government. Id. at 27. The CO further determined that even when compared to Main Sail's unadjusted, total proposed cost of \$48,574,022, the benefits of GovSG's proposal justified its higher costs. Id.

The Navy provided Main Sail with a written debriefing on September 9, 2015, and Main Sail filed the instant protest with this Office on September 21. Protest at 2.

## DISCUSSION

Main Sail challenges the Navy's evaluation of proposals on several grounds.<sup>3</sup> First, Main Sail contends that the Navy's evaluation of its proposal under the technical/management capability factor unreasonably failed to account for the fact that the RFP limited offerors to eight pages to address this factor. Second, the protester argues that the agency erred in assigning weaknesses to its proposal under the personnel qualifications factor. Third, Main Sail contends that the Navy conducted a flawed cost realism evaluation, resulting in improper upward adjustments to its proposed costs. Fourth, the protester asserts that the agency credited GovSG's proposal with unwarranted strengths and engaged in disparate treatment when evaluating the technical/management capability factor. For the reasons discussed below, we deny the protest.<sup>4</sup>

It is well-established that in reviewing challenges to the agency's evaluation of proposals, we do not reevaluate proposals, but rather, review the agency's evaluation to ensure that it was reasonable, consistent with the terms of the solicitation, and consistent with applicable statutes and regulations. Philips Med. Sys. N. Am. Co., B-293945.2, June 17, 2004, 2004 CPD ¶ 129 at 2. An offeror's disagreement with the agency's evaluation is not sufficient to render the evaluation unreasonable. Ben-Mar Enters., Inc., B-295781, Apr. 7, 2005, 2005 CPD ¶ 68 at 7.

### Evaluation of Main Sail's Proposal

Main Sail contends that in evaluating the technical/management capability factor, the Navy demanded an unreasonable level of detail given the RFP's eight-page limit to address this factor. Protest at 18-20. As discussed above, however, the solicitation directed offerors to describe their proposed approach for meeting the four technical/management capability subfactors and identified the specific topics to be addressed under each subfactor as well as the applicable PWS sections. RFP at 43-44. Thus, the RFP clearly put offerors on notice of the various requirements

---

<sup>3</sup> In its initial protest, Main Sail also challenged the Navy's evaluation of GovSG's past performance and organizational experience and its evaluation of the protester's past performance. In its comments on the agency report, Main Sail expressly withdrew its arguments regarding GovSG's proposal under these factors and did not respond to the agency's arguments addressing the evaluation of the protester's own past performance. Comments at 2 n.1. As such, we consider these issues abandoned. Earth Res. Tech., Inc., B-403043.2, B-403043.3, Oct. 18, 2010, 2010 CPD ¶ 248 at 6.

<sup>4</sup> Main Sail raises several additional arguments challenging the Navy's evaluation. Although we do not discuss them all, we have considered the protester's arguments, and find that they provide no basis to sustain the protest.

that they were to address in their technical proposals. To the extent that Main Sail believed it was impossible to cover all of the topics identified in the RFP within eight pages, the protester was required to raise this issue prior to the close of the solicitation. 4 C.F.R. § 21.2(a)(1); see also InfoZen, Inc., B-408234 et al., July 23, 2013, 2013 CPD ¶ 211 at 3-4 n.3 (allegation that page limit for technical proposals was insufficient to address all of the requirements is untimely when first raised after the solicitation's closing date).

Moreover, we find that the protester has not demonstrated that the agency's evaluation of its technical/management proposal was unreasonable or inconsistent with the solicitation. In this regard, for the majority of the weaknesses assigned by the Navy under the technical capability/management factor, the protester has not argued with any specificity how its proposal in fact addressed the requirements of the RFP given the page constraints.<sup>5</sup> Protest at 18-20. As such, Main Sail has not raised factually sufficient bases to challenge many of the weaknesses assessed in its proposal. See 4 C.F.R. §§ 21.1(c)(4), 21.5(f); Aero Simulation, Inc., B-411373, B-411373.2, July 2, 2015, 2015 CPD ¶ 233 at 6-7 (GAO's Bid Protest Regulations "require that a protest include a sufficiently detailed statement of the grounds supporting the protest allegations."). Further, with respect to the handful of weaknesses that Main Sail specifically challenges, we find that the protester's arguments provide no basis to sustain the protest.

By way of example, Main Sail argues that the Navy unreasonably assigned its proposal a weakness relating to the protester's management of the agency's automated helpdesk system. Protest at 19-20. Specifically, the protester contends that its proposal provided the very information the Navy claimed was missing and that the agency's assessment of this weakness contradicts the strength it assigned Main Sail's proposal for demonstrating an understanding of helpdesk ticket routing and escalation. Id. The Navy responds that while the protester's proposal described its general approach for managing helpdesk tickets, and warranted a strength for its overall understanding of the agency's process for escalating and tracking issues, Main Sail's proposal did not discuss the PWS requirement regarding the handling of helpdesk tickets for a specific group of individuals known as user management leads. Memorandum of Law at 20-21. The record supports

---

<sup>5</sup> In its comments on the agency report, the protester raised additional arguments as to why the specific weaknesses assigned to its proposal were unwarranted given the content of its proposal. Comments at 9-15. These arguments are untimely, however, as Main Sail was aware of the factual bases for these contentions at the time it filed its initial protest but did not raise them at that time. 4 C.F.R. § 21.2(a)(2) (requiring protest issue be filed within 10 days after the basis is known or should have been known); see also Lanmark Tech., Inc., B-410214.3, March 20, 2015, 2015 CPD ¶ 139 at 5 n.2 (piecemeal presentation of protest grounds, raised for the first time in comments, are untimely).

the agency's concern. The relevant section of the PWS expressly requires the contractor to evaluate helpdesk tickets generated by user manager leads, yet the corresponding section of the protester's proposal does not in fact mention user manager leads at all. AR, exh. 8, Main Sail Technical Proposal, at 7; PWS at 10. It is an offeror's responsibility to submit a well-written proposal, with adequately detailed information that clearly demonstrates compliance with the solicitation and allows a meaningful review by the procuring agency. See All Native, Inc., B-411693 et al., Oct. 5, 2015, 2015 CPD ¶ 337 at 4. Based on the record, we have no basis to question the agency's evaluation of this aspect of Main Sail's proposal.

Next, Main Sail contends that the agency relied on an unstated evaluation criterion when evaluating the personnel qualifications factor. Protest at 16-17. As discussed above, the RFP required offerors to demonstrate the extent to which their proposed employees met the qualifications identified in the solicitation, including eligibility for a secret level security clearance. RFP at 48. Main Sail argues that the Navy improperly assigned its proposal weaknesses because three of its proposed employees did not have a prior or current security clearance. According to Main Sail, the RFP required only that employees be eligible for a secret level security clearance. Protest at 17. The record, however, reflects that the agency assessed the weaknesses at issue not because the individuals lacked a prior or current security clearance, but rather because Main Sail's proposal lacked any information concerning the employees' ability to obtain the necessary clearance. AR, exh. 5, SSEB Report, at 28; AR, exh. 6, SSD, at 25. In this regard, the resume template to be completed by the offerors specifically included a box entitled "Security Clearance," which the protester simply left blank for the three employees. RFP at 134; AR, exh. 8, Main Sail Technical Proposal, at 18, 21, 24. Likewise, Main Sail's proposal provided no other information concerning the ability of the employees to obtain a secret level security clearance. AR, exh. 8, Main Sail Technical Proposal, at 18, 21, 24. As such, we find the agency's assessment of weaknesses regarding this aspect of the protester's proposal to be reasonable and consistent with the solicitation.

In reaching this conclusion, we find no merit to the protester's argument that under the RFP, offerors only needed to propose employees that were U.S. citizens in order to demonstrate that the individuals were "eligible" for a secret level security clearance. Comments at 6-7. As the protester acknowledges, a secret level security clearance involves consideration of far more than whether an individual is a U.S. citizen. Id. at 7. Accordingly, we find that the agency reasonably interpreted the RFP as requiring offerors to demonstrate more than the most basic qualification necessary to obtain a secret level security clearance, and reasonably assigned Main Sail's proposal weaknesses where it failed to do so. See All Native, Inc., supra ("An offeror that does not affirmatively demonstrate the merits of its proposal risks its rejection.").

The protester also argues that the agency erred in assessing its proposal a weakness on the basis that one of its employees lived outside the commuting area of the government's worksite in Charleston, South Carolina. Protest at 17. Main Sail notes that its proposal indicated that the employee at issue was currently in the process of relocating to Charleston. *Id.* Although the protester is correct that the contemporaneous evaluation record does not reflect that the Navy considered this information, we find that Main Sail was not prejudiced by any error in this regard. Specifically, we agree with the agency that there is no reasonable possibility that the Navy's award decision would be affected by the elimination of one of the five weaknesses assigned to the protester's proposal under the non-cost evaluation factor that was ranked third in terms of importance. Competitive prejudice is an essential element of a viable protest; where, as here, the record establishes no reasonable possibility of prejudice, we will not sustain a protest even if a defect in the procurement is found. See Excellus Solutions, Inc., B-410959.3, July 24, 2015, 2015 CPD ¶ 241 at 5.

Similarly, we find that the protester was not prejudiced by any of the errors it alleges in the agency's cost realism evaluation. As discussed above, in making the best-value tradeoff decision, the CO determined that the benefits of GovSG's proposal outweighed the cost savings offered by Main Sail's unadjusted, total proposed cost. AR, exh. 6, SSD, at 27. Given that the agency found that the disparity in technical ratings between the two proposals justified a cost premium of \$4,734,244, we have no basis to question the agency's contemporaneous determination that increasing the cost difference by an additional \$1,283,793 would not alter the award decision. Accordingly, as we find no prejudicial error in the agency's evaluation under the technical factors, there is no possibility of prejudice resulting from any error in the agency's cost evaluation. See Savantage Fin. Servs., Inc., B-400109.2, July 28, 2008, 2008 CPD ¶ 150 at 9.

#### Evaluation of GovSG's Proposal

Main Sail contends that the agency's evaluation of the awardee's proposal was also flawed. In this respect, the protester generally argues that GovSG's technical/management approach should have been found unacceptable because it described the services that the incumbent was currently providing rather than those it would provide under the anticipated task order. Supp. Protest at 5-6. Similarly, Main Sail contends that the agency "filled the gaps" in GovSG's technical/management proposal with its own knowledge of the incumbent's prior performance and with information contained in the organizational experience section of the proposal. Supp. Comments at 6-8. Contrary to the protester's assertions, however, GovSG's proposal did not simply reference its prior experience, but instead described the details of its technical/management approach in the context of the services it was currently providing. See, e.g., AR, exh. 10, GovSG Technical Proposal, at 3 ("For each tested item we [GovSG] deliver test plans, test scripts, and tests results to the customer."). The fact that GovSG's

proposal described its technical/management approach using the present tense as opposed to the future tense is a matter of semantics and thus irrelevant to the acceptability of GovSG's proposal. More importantly, as discussed below, based on our review of the record, we have no basis to question the reasonableness of the agency's evaluation of the awardee's proposal.

Main Sail also argues that the agency assigned strengths to GovSG's proposal under the technical/management capability factor that are not supported by the awardee's proposal. Supp. Protest at 6-9. For example, Main Sail contends that the agency unreasonably assigned a strength to GovSG's proposal based on the awardee's exceptional understanding of a Navy data center. Id. at 7-8. The protester argues that GovSG's proposal does not mention or describe Navy data centers in particular, but instead generally addresses network and server support activities. Id. The agency responds that GovSG's proposal specifically addressed the "NEDC," i.e., the Navy Enterprise Data Center at issue, including how it would provide an integrated virtual hosting and development environment. Supp. Memorandum of Law at 15-16. Based on our review of the record, we find that the protester's argument provides no basis to sustain the protest.<sup>6</sup> See Ross Techs., Inc., B-405266.2, Dec. 7, 2011, 2012 CPD ¶ 9 at 2 (a protester's disagreement with the agency's judgment in its evaluation does not establish that the evaluation was unreasonable).

Finally, the protester contends that in several instances, the agency engaged in unequal treatment by assigning its proposal weaknesses and significant weaknesses due to a lack of details concerning its technical/management approach, whereas GovSG's proposal was not faulted for failing to provide the same information. Comments at 15-17. By way of example, Main Sail argues it received a weakness under the management subfactor for failing to address Systems Applications and Products (SAP) project management in accordance with Advanced SAP (ASAP) methodologies; yet, according to the protester, GovSG's proposal referenced the ASAP methodology only in passing.<sup>7</sup> Id. at 16. As noted

---

<sup>6</sup> The Navy acknowledges that one of the strengths assigned to GovSG's proposal under the program management subfactor was based primarily on the experience of one of the awardee's proposed employees, rather than GovSG's management approach. Supp. Memorandum of Law at 21. Even assuming this strength was not warranted under the technical/management capability factor, however, the protester has not demonstrated it was prejudiced by any such error, given that it would result in the elimination of just 1 of the awardee's 20 strengths under this factor. See Excellus Solutions, Inc., supra.

<sup>7</sup> SAP is a German company that makes enterprise software, including the N-ERP software. PWS at 1. According to the agency, ASAP is the SAP-developed, software-development lifecycle methodology used for SAP implementations and major releases. Memorandum of Law at 27 n.4.

by the agency, however, GovSG's proposal expressly provided that it would utilize the ASAP methodology in performing a variety of tasks, including planning and execution as well as configuring and implementing automated data management tools. AR, exh. 10, GovSG Technical Proposal, at 2. By contrast, Main Sail's technical/management proposal makes no mention of the ASAP methodology. As such, we find the protester has failed to show the agency's evaluation was unreasonable or inconsistent with the RFP.

The protest is denied.

Susan A. Poling  
General Counsel