



Decision

Matter of: Cydecor Inc.
File: B-422942; B-422942.2
Date: December 23, 2024

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.

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DIGEST

1. Protest challenging the agency's evaluation of task order proposals is denied where the record shows the evaluation largely was reasonable, and any errors that occurred did not competitively prejudice the protester.
 2. Protest arguing the agency applied an incorrect evaluation factor weighting scheme when making the best-value decision is denied where the record reflects that correcting this error would not change the award outcome based on the solicitation's highest technically rated, reasonably priced offer source selection methodology.
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DECISION

Cydecor Inc., of Arlington, Virginia, protests the issuance of a task order to Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC), of Reston, Virginia, under request for proposals (RFP) No. 47QFHA24R0004, issued by the General Services Administration (GSA) on behalf of the Department of Defense (DOD) for personnel and readiness infrastructure support management (PRISM) services. The protester challenges GSA's evaluation of proposals and resulting best-value source selection decision.

We deny the protest.

BACKGROUND

On February 2, 2024, GSA issued the PRISM solicitation seeking to award multiple indefinite-delivery, indefinite-quantity (IDIQ) contracts, or MATOCs (multiple-award task order contracts), and initial orders under the MATOCs. Agency Report (AR), Tab D.1,

RFP at 2-4, 81, 101; Tab G.1, Award Decision at 5.¹ The PRISM solicitation is to provide DOD “with innovative and cost-effective services that incorporate industry best practices to meet the demands associated with a dynamic global threat and security environment,” and seeks the provision of “enterprise solutions to enhance P&R [personnel and readiness] capabilities that will enable soldiers and strategic partners to increase readiness and meet mission requirements through more efficient collaboration and integration.” RFP at 3.

The solicitation contemplated creation of two pools of MATOC contractors--a P&R pool and a Major DOD Systems (MDODS) pool--with a portion of the awards in each pool reserved for small businesses. RFP at 3, 87, 101. For the P&R pool, the solicitation anticipated approximately eight awards--four each for large and small businesses. *Id.* at 101. For the MDODS pool, the solicitation anticipated approximately six awards--three each for large and small businesses. *Id.* The solicitation provided that task orders issued under the MATOCs would be fixed-price, cost-plus-fixed-fee, or hybrid. *Id.* at 3, 5, 80. Each individual MATOC would have a 1-year base period, four 1-year option periods, a minimum guarantee of \$2,500, and a maximum per order limit of \$400 million. *Id.* at 6, 15. The total ceiling for all awarded PRISM MATOCs would be \$1.8 billion. *Id.* at 6.

For the base MATOCs, the solicitation required offerors to submit several proposal volumes: general; responsibility; technical; past performance; systems, certifications, and clearances; and cost/price, which the agency would evaluate using the procedures of Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) part 15. RFP at 90-96, 101. Also for the MATOCs, the solicitation provided “[t]he basis for award will be the Highest Technically Rated Offeror with a Fair and Reasonable Price (HTRO-RP),” considering the following four non-price evaluation factors, listed in descending order of importance: (1) technical approach; (2) key personnel; (3) corporate experience; and (4) past performance. *Id.* at 101. The technical approach factor consisted of three equally important subfactors--technical approach, key personnel, and corporate experience. *Id.* at 96, 101. For non-price factors, proposals would be evaluated and assigned one of the following combined technical/risk adjectival ratings: outstanding, good, acceptable, marginal, or unacceptable. *Id.* at 104-105. The non-price factors combined were significantly more important than price, and price would only be evaluated for the highest technical-rated offerors in each pool to reach the anticipated number of awards. *Id.*

In addition to seeking to award multiple IDIQ contracts, the PRISM solicitation included three “[s]eed task order” projects that were to be evaluated and awarded concurrent with the MATOC. RFP at 4. Two of the seed task orders were for the P&R pool and the third seed task order was for the MDODS pool. *Id.* The solicitation included a “Task Order Basis of Award” section separate from the section outlining the evaluation and selection methodology to be used for award of the base MATOCs. RFP at 102. The task order award section explained that order issuance would use the procedures of FAR subpart 16.5, and that ordering activities would have the option to choose from a

¹ Our citations are to the Adobe PDF pagination of documents in the record.

variety of award methodologies for any particular task order. *Id.* The options included HTRO-RP; lowest-priced, technically acceptable (LPTA); or tradeoff. *Id.* at 102. The solicitation explained that a tradeoff methodology would be used “when it will be important to allow for tradeoffs among cost or price and technical factors,” while a HTRO-RP methodology would “be used when high technical competency is required without the need to trade-off cost or price and streamlining is needed.” *Id.*

Further, the solicitation established a process referred to as STOOOP--streamlined task order ordering procedures. RFP at 3, 102. Using the STOOOP selection process, ordering activities would issue to all offerors within the appropriate MATOC pool a “STOOOP Notice,” providing: (1) a task order requirements package; (2) the relevant functional area(s) applicable to the order requirements; (3) notice that the corporate experience applicable to the relevant functional area(s) from the contractors’ MATOC proposals would be used for order evaluation purposes;² (4) “any additional relevant non-price factors that will be evaluated (e.g., Key Personnel for relevant functional area, Past Performance, etc.) depending on the Task Order Basis of Award (TOBOA)”;

(5) the TOBOA; and (6) a request to provide an order specific price or cost proposal and 1-page order specific technical proposal within 15 days. *Id.* at 102-103.

At issue here, is the task order for the MDODS pool, which sought the provision of defense readiness reporting system (DRRS) sustainment services through a cost-plus-fixed-fee order with a 1-year base period and two 1-year option periods. Contracting Officer’s Statement (COS) at 1; Protest at 1; RFP at 123; AR, Tab G.1, Award Decision at 49. For the DRRS seed order, the solicitation stated: “The government intends to utilize STOOOP selection procedures.” RFP at 123. The solicitation then provided, in relevant part:

- b. Relevant Functional area:
 - 1. Factor 3 Corporate Experience submission for MDODS functional area Sustainment.
- c. Other Non-Price Factor to be Evaluated
 - 1. Factor 2 Key Personnel submission for MDODS Key Personnel.
- d. TOBOA: HTRO-RP.
- e. Contractor Seed Task Order Submission:
 - 1. Provide a Task Order Specific technical approach and
 - 2. Provide DRRS staffing labor mix/level of effort (See DRRS Staff Matrix Attachment) and
 - 3. Provide the Seed Task order Price Template to perform the work, including Assumptions/Exceptions

Id. at 123-124 (emphasis omitted).

² To ensure experience information did not become stale for purposes of order evaluation, the solicitation provided: “All MATOC Awardees will be allowed to provide yearly updates [to] Corporate Experience, Key Personnel and Past Performance.” RFP at 103.

Cydecor submitted a proposal for, and received award of, a PRISM MATOC under the MDODS pool. Protest at 10. Cydecor and SAIC were the only two MDODS MATOC holders that submitted proposals for the DRRS seed task order. AR, Tab G.1, Award Decision at 6. The agency evaluated Cydecor’s and SAIC’s task order proposals as follows:

	Cydecor	SAIC
Task Order Technical Approach	Good ³	Outstanding
Key Personnel (from MATOC)	Outstanding	Outstanding
Corporate Experience (from MATOC for sustainment area)	Outstanding	Outstanding
Price	Not Evaluated	\$186,936,895.71

Id. at 25, 47-48; Tab H.2, Cydecor TO Eval. Rpt. at 2. The contracting officer, who also served as the source selection authority (SSA), considered the non-price factors (including their respective weight) and concluded that SAIC’s superior rating under the most important factor resulted in its task order proposal being the most highly rated. AR, Tab G.1, Award Decision at 2, 5, 47-48. The SSA then evaluated SAIC’s proposed price to be fair and reasonable, and selected SAIC’s DRRS seed task order proposal as the best value HTRO-RP offer. *Id.* at 2, 25, 49.

After being notified of the source selection decision, and receiving a debriefing, Cydecor, the incumbent firm performing the solicited DRRS sustainment services work, filed this protest with our Office.⁴ Protest at 2.

DISCUSSION

The protester challenges the agency’s evaluation of Cydecor’s task order technical approach, SAIC’s key personnel, and SAIC’s corporate experience. Further, the protester argues the agency applied an evaluation factor weighting scheme inconsistent with the solicitation and failed to look behind the adjectival ratings in making the

³ Although the award decision document repeatedly states Cydecor received a rating of acceptable under the task order technical approach factor, the underlying evaluation record shows that the technical evaluation board assigned a rating of good to the protester’s task order technical approach. AR, Tab G.1, Award Decision at 3, 26-28, 47-48; Tab H.2, Cydecor Task Order (TO) Evaluation Report (Eval. Rpt.) at 2. This error is discussed further below.

⁴ While the protested task order will be in support of a DOD organization, the IDIQ contracts under which this task order procurement was conducted were awarded by GSA--a civilian agency. As such, the \$10 million jurisdictional threshold in title 41 of the U.S. Code applies to our consideration of jurisdiction to resolve a protest of a task order. See 41 U.S.C. § 4106(f)(B)(2); *Analytic Strategies LLC; Gemini Indus., Inc.*, B-413758.2, B-413758.3, Nov. 28, 2016, 2016 CPD ¶ 340 at 2-3 n.2.

best-value source selection decision. Cydecor makes additional arguments to those discussed below. While we do not address every issue raised, we have considered all Cydecor's arguments and conclude none furnishes a basis on which to sustain the protest.

Preliminary Issues

Before turning to the merits of Cydecor's protest, we address its procedural sufficiency. Cydecor's protest challenges the agency's evaluation of SAIC's task order proposal under each non-price factor (task order technical approach, key personnel, and corporate experience). See *generally* Protest at 17-21. Prior to GSA's submission of its report responding to the protest, awardee SAIC, as the intervenor, requested that our Office dismiss the protester's challenges to the agency's evaluation of SAIC's task order proposal, arguing, in relevant part, that Cydecor's allegations were speculative and failed to state a valid basis of protest. Intervenor's Req. for Partial Dismissal at 1. While we declined to dismiss the protester's challenges to SAIC's evaluation under the key personnel factor and the corporate experience factor, we did not require the agency to respond to the protester's challenge to SAIC's evaluation under the task order technical approach factor. Electronic Protest Docketing System at No. 12.

Our Bid Protest Regulations require that a protest include a detailed statement of the legal and factual grounds for the protest, and that the grounds stated be legally sufficient. 4 C.F.R. § 21.1(c)(4), (f). Our decisions explain that when a protester's allegations are based on speculation, factual inaccuracies, or flawed legal assumptions, they fail to meet the requirements of our regulations and may be summarily dismissed without requiring the agency to submit a report. See *Xenith Group, LLC*, B-420706, July 14, 2022, 2022 CPD ¶ 184 at 3.

Here, Cydecor's challenges to the evaluation of SAIC's key personnel and corporate experience include specific factual allegations based on, among other things: the protester's experience working alongside SAIC in the DRRS space; a representation that "SAIC's lack of experienced key personnel is evident from the fact that SAIC is now asking Cydecor to join its team"; and a protest exhibit showing a recruiting message from one of SAIC's employees in which the employee states that a current contract of SAIC's "has been pretty much a pass through contract except for some testing and helpdesk, so I/we have so much to learn about DRRS and really engage in the daily mission." Protest at 17-21; Protest Exh. G, Message from SAIC Employee at 2. While the intervenor contests the accuracy of the information presented by Cydecor, such disagreements generally go to the merits of a protest allegation, rather than its procedural sufficiency. See Intervenor's Req. for Partial Dismissal at 3 n.1-2. Accordingly, we consider Cydecor's allegations sufficiently supported to meet the procedural requirements of our regulations and decline to dismiss them. See e.g., *Chags Health Info. Tech., LLC*, B-420940.3 *et al.*, Dec. 14, 2022, 2022 CPD ¶ 315 at 6 (finding sufficient protest arguments supported by facts and evidence rather than relying solely on speculation).

In contrast, Cydecor's challenge to the evaluation of SAIC's proposal under the task order technical approach factor reads, in its entirety: "Moreover, because an offeror's ability to submit a knowledgeable and low-risk technical response depends on its understanding of and capacity to manage the DRRS systems, there is no basis for SAIC to have received an Outstanding rating under the Task Order Specific Technical Approach, either." Protest at 21. This contention lacks any specific factual allegations, supported or otherwise, and is wholly derivative of Cydecor's challenges to the evaluation of SAIC's key personnel and corporate experience. Such a bare allegation is insufficient to meet the procedural requirements of our regulations, and we dismiss Cydecor's challenge to SAIC's evaluation under the task order technical approach factor. See e.g., *Eagle Techs., Inc.*, B-420135.2 *et al.*, June 22, 2022, 2022 CPD ¶ 198 at 7 (dismissing as insufficiently plead protester's "naked conclusion that its overall risk assessment rating should have been lower"); *Innovative Mgmt. Concepts, Inc.*, B-419834.2, B-419834.3, Sept. 20, 2021, 2021 CPD ¶ 319 at 17 (dismissing derivative challenge to agency's best-value tradeoff "because derivative allegations do not establish an independent bases of protest").

Evaluation Challenges

Turning to the merits of Cydecor's protest, as an initial matter, we note that when reviewing a protest challenging an agency's evaluation, our Office will not reevaluate proposals nor substitute our judgment for that of the agency, as the evaluation of proposals is a matter within the agency's discretion. *Innovative Mgmt. Concepts, Inc.*, *supra* at 6. Rather, we will review the record to determine whether the agency's evaluation was reasonable and consistent with the solicitation's evaluation criteria and with applicable procurement statutes and regulations. *Id.*; *Candor Solutions, LLC*, B-417950.5, B-417950.6, May 10, 2021, 2021 CPD ¶ 199 at 5. A protester's disagreement with the agency's judgment of the relative merits of competing proposals, without more, does not establish that the evaluation was unreasonable. *Cognosante MVH, LLC*; *Pro Sphere-Tek, Inc.*, B-421150 *et al.*, Jan. 10, 2023, 2023 CPD ¶ 18 at 12. Further, competitive prejudice is an essential element of every viable protest, and our Office will not sustain a protest unless the protester demonstrates that, but for the agency's improper actions, it would have had a substantial chance of receiving the award. *CACI, Inc.--Fed.*, B-420729.2, Mar. 1, 2023, 2023 CPD ¶ 51 at 14-15.

Cydecor's Task Order Technical Approach

As noted above, for the DRRS task order, the solicitation established task order specific technical approach as one of the three evaluation factors. RFP at 103, 123. The record shows the evaluators assessed one strength for Cydecor's task order technical approach and assigned the firm's proposal a rating of good. AR, Tab H.2, Cydecor TO Eval. Rpt. at 2. Specifically, the evaluators found Cydecor's approach "leverages their incumbency as the low-risk approach," "covers contract transition which in their case would be minimal," and "provides a text response to the PWS [performance work

statement] tasks that restates the requirement while highlighting the key personnel associated with each task.” *Id.* at 3.

The protester maintains it “demonstrated numerous ways in which its proposed technical approach materially exceeded requirements to the Government’s benefit and should have garnered multiple strengths.” Protest at 14. Specifically, Cydecor claims its proposal merited the assessment of four additional strengths. *Id.* at 14-15.

First, the protester contends the evaluators should have assessed a strength because “Cydecor’s proposal highlighted the fact that it ‘is the only demonstrated offeror with a fully staffed team of DRRS-S experts.’” Protest at 14 (citing AR, Tab E.1.1, Cydecor TO Technical Proposal at 1). The protester’s contention is not supported by the record, where, as part of the assessed strength for this factor, the evaluators recognized Cydecor’s approach “provides a text response to the PWS tasks . . . while highlighting the key personnel associated with each task.” AR, Tab H.2., Cydecor TO Eval. Rpt. at 3. Further, key personnel was a separate and distinct evaluation factor for the DRRS task order, under which the evaluators assessed 12 significant strengths in Cydecor’s proposal, in part because of the firm’s proposed use of incumbent key personnel. *Id.* at 3-8; RFP at 123. When, as here, a solicitation contains separate and independent technical evaluation factors encompassing separate subject areas, with each factor assigned separate weights under the solicitation’s stated evaluation scheme, an agency may not double count, triple count, or otherwise greatly exaggerate the importance of any one listed factor. *CSRA LLC, B-417635 et al.*, Sept. 11, 2019, 2019 CPD ¶ 341 at 12. Accordingly, we find no merit in the protester’s argument that the evaluators should have assessed additional strengths for the firm’s “fully staffed team of DRRS-S experts” under either the technical approach factor or key personnel factor.

Second, the protester asserts the agency should have assessed a strength because “Cydecor highlighted that it would use ‘both [DELETED] and [DELETED] principles to create a [DELETED] process that achieves all PWS task functions within these challenges that [DELETED].’”⁵ Protest at 14 (citing AR, Tab E.1.1., Cydecor TO Technical Proposal at 1). In Cydecor’s view, “[t]his uniquely [DELETED] approach” provides benefits meriting the assessment of a strength. Protest at 14-15. This assertion, however, is not supported by Cydecor’s proposal. In this regard, the protester’s proposal stated only that it would use a combination of [DELETED] principles to create a [DELETED] process, without explaining how that process might benefit the agency--an explanation that is found only in Cydecor’s protest. See AR, Tab E.1.1, Cydecor TO Technical Proposal at 1. Thus, we find nothing objectionable with the agency’s position that the “evaluation did not include factors for incumbency or inclusion of ‘self-evident’ attributes that were not part of the actual documentation provided in the Task Order Specific Technical Approach.” COS at 18.

It is an offeror’s responsibility to submit a well-written proposal, with adequately detailed information that demonstrates compliance with the solicitation requirements and allows

⁵ [DELETED] stands for [DELETED] and [DELETED] stands for [DELETED].

for a meaningful review by the procuring agency. *VMD Sys. Integrators, Inc.*, B-421197, Dec. 12, 2022, 2022 CPD ¶ 313 at 6. Agencies are not required to infer information from an inadequately detailed proposal, or to supply information that the protester elected not to provide. *Innovative Mgmt. Concepts, Inc. supra* at 7. While the protester may believe its proposal included sufficient information to demonstrate why its [DELETED] approach exceeded the solicitation requirements in a manner beneficial to the government, the record before us provides no basis to question the agency's judgment to the contrary.

Third, the protester claims its proposal merited assessment of a strength because the solicitation sets ambitious project targets, and Cydecor's proposal explained that "[d]istracted focus from these priorities to onboard a new offeror will cause significant delays in FY25 [fiscal year 2025] Program Schedule," and that Cydecor was "uniquely positioned to provide the lowest-risk approach for meeting the Agency's stated goals." Protest at 15 (citing AR, Tab E.1.1, Cydecor TO Technical Proposal at 1) (emphasis omitted). Along the same line, Cydecor's fourth argument for meriting an additional strength is that its proposal "noted the risk of loss of continuity of operations and the severe, adverse impact that unplanned outages in the complex DRRS system would create," while explaining how Cydecor's "expertise in this area for nearly 20 years, with these specific technology systems and their idiosyncrasies, eliminated the steep learning curve other offerors would face." *Id.*

The essence of both arguments is the protester's insistence that, as the incumbent contractor, it can offer the agency a transition with little to no risk, while other firms will not be able to meet the agency's needs without undue delay and disruption. As noted above, however, the evaluators already recognized--and assessed as a strength--the low-risk approach and minimal transition offered by Cydecor. AR, Tab H.2, Cydecor TO Eval. Rpt. at 2. The protester's contention that the evaluators should have assessed three strengths, rather than one, on this same basis reflects nothing more than Cydecor's disagreement with the agency's evaluation judgments. See e.g., *Solution One Indus., Inc.*, B-417441 *et al.*, July 9, 2019, 2019 CPD ¶ 252 at 7 (denying challenge to assessment of a single strength rather than multiple strengths for quality control plan as argument "simply represent disagreement with the agency's reasonable judgment"). Further, as our decisions have repeatedly explained, a protester's arguments that its incumbency entitles it to higher ratings or additional strengths do not provide a basis for finding that the agency unreasonably evaluated proposals. See *CACI, Inc.--Fed.*, B-420729.2, *supra* at 9 n.8; *Innovative Mgmt. Concepts, Inc.*, *supra* at 4-5 n.6; *Candor Solutions, LLC*, *supra* at 15. Accordingly, we deny Cydecor's challenges to the evaluation of its own proposal under the task order specific technical approach factor.

SAIC's Key Personnel

For the DRRS task order, the solicitation provided the agency would evaluate offerors' key personnel from the MDODS portion of their MATOC proposals. RFP at 123. The record reflects the evaluators assessed 12 significant strengths in SAIC's proposal under the key personnel factor, which resulted in an assigned rating of outstanding.

AR, Tab H.1, SAIC TO Eval. Rpt. at 3. The protester takes issue with the agency's evaluation and assessment of significant strengths for 3 of the awardee's 12 personnel--who we refer to as P, B, and O--each of whom was proposed as a subject matter expert (SME).⁶ See *generally* Comments & Supp. Protest at 10-12.

For all three of the challenged employees, Cydecor contends the evaluators incorrectly assessed SAIC's proposed personnel against the requirements for the project manager position, rather than the SME position. Comments & Supp. Protest at 11-12. In support of its argument, the protester cites to excerpts from SAIC's evaluation report and the award decision. For example, for key person P, the evaluation report states:

The offeror proposed [P] to fulfill the role of Subject Matter Expert. [P] more than exceeds the education and experience requirements with a PhD in Public Policy, MA in Public Policy and BA in Public Policy. [P] has 12+ years of experience in one or more of the P&R Pool and/or MDoDS

⁶ Cydecor also challenges the evaluation of its own proposal under the key personnel factor. Primarily, the protester argues the agency applied an unstated evaluation criterion when GSA considered some of the key people included in offerors' MATOC-level proposals to not be relevant for purposes of evaluating offerors' task order-level proposals, which resulted in Cydecor's proposal being assessed only 12, rather than 16, significant strengths. See *generally* Protest at 16-17. The agency contends that Cydecor's argument is based on an unreasonable interpretation of the solicitation. COS at 19; Memorandum of Law (MOL) at 7. We need not resolve the parties' disagreement over the solicitation language, because even if we read the solicitation in the manner advanced by the protester, Cydecor's argument fails to demonstrate the firm was competitively prejudiced.

Specifically, the record shows the agency applied the same relevancy interpretation in evaluating both Cydecor's and SAIC's key personnel. In this respect, the SSA removed the same four key personnel positions--a program manager, two project managers, and a senior systems engineer--from consideration for both offerors, because the SSA did not find the positions to be relevant to the task order evaluation. AR, Tab G.1, Award Decision at 16, 28. Also, the record reflects that all four of the removed key people for both offerors were assessed significant strengths by the evaluators, prior to the SSA's removal of the positions from consideration. *Id.* at 16-18, 29-30. Thus, even if we agreed with Cydecor that the SSA improperly removed four of the protester's key people, and their associated significant strengths, the result would be that both Cydecor and SAIC would gain four additional significant strengths under the task order key personnel factor. This net result would be no change in the relative positions of the two offerors, both of which were already assessed the highest possible rating (outstanding) under this factor. Accordingly, Cydecor's challenge to the evaluation of its own key personnel provides no basis to sustain the protest. See *e.g.*, *VMD Sys. Integrators, Inc.*, *supra* at 10 (denying protest that evaluation of protester's proposal deviated from solicitation because protester could not show it was prejudiced where agency made same deviation in evaluating the awardee's proposal).

Pool functional areas listed in Factor 3 Corporate Experience, as an SME on Professional Service Contracts at the TO [task order] level. [P] is an excellent fit for this key personnel position. This gives the Government very high confidence that the offeror fully understands the Project Manager position and can fully support this manning requirement. This reduces the risk to the Government of the offeror delivering ineffective support.

AR, Tab H.1, SAIC TO Eval. Rpt. at 4.

The evaluators made similar findings for key persons B and O--stating that they were proposed as SMEs, listing their degrees, noting their years of experience performing as SMEs, but then incorrectly referring to the project manager position when discussing the findings of confidence and reduced risk associated with each key person. AR, Tab H.1, SAIC TO Eval. Rpt. at 4-5. In the award decision, the SSA quoted from the evaluators' report for each of the three personnel (including repetition of the incorrect reference to the project manager position), and then provided a concurrence assessment in which the SSA correctly noted the three personnel had the necessary experience performing as SMEs. AR, Tab G.1, Award Decision at 19-20. The SSA also correctly noted that SAIC proposed P, B, and O as SMEs. *Id.* at 16. For example, the SSA's concurrence finding for P reads in relevant part: "[P] has 12+ years of experience in all three MDoDS Pool functional areas listed in Factor 3, Corporate Experience, as a SME on Professional Services Contracts at the TO level." *Id.* at 19.

The agency explains Cydecor's contention that key personnel P, B, and O were evaluated as project managers, rather than SMEs, "is entirely erroneous, as the Project Manager position was not evaluated under the DRRS Seed Task Order." 2nd Supp. COS at 3. Further, the agency asserts that even "[t]he most cursory review of the Agency Record clearly shows that the term 'project manager' . . . [was] inadvertently included by the [evaluators]," and that the evaluations were based on P, B, and O being proposed as SMEs. Supp. MOL at 1. Similarly, the intervenor characterizes the evaluators' references to the project manager, rather than SME, position as "clear typographical error[s]" rather than substantive flaws in the evaluation. Intervenor Supp. Comments at 2.

Here, reading the assessments of key personnel P, B, and O,--in their entireties--reflects that the evaluators, and most importantly the SSA, knew SAIC proposed the three people to perform as SMEs and that the three had the requisite experience performing as SMEs. See AR, Tab H.1, SAIC TO Eval. Rpt. at 4-5; Tab G.1, Award Decision at 16, 19-20. Importantly, Cydecor has never argued that the three personnel fail to meet the requirements for the SME position. See *generally* Comments & Supp. protest at 11-12. Accordingly, we deny this portion of Cydecor's challenge to the evaluation of SAIC's key personnel. See *e.g.*, *CACI, Inc.--Fed.*, B-421626.6, B-421626.9, Dec. 13, 2023, 2024 CPD ¶ 6 at 11 (denying challenge to evaluation of awardee's personnel where protester disagreed with various aspects of evaluation but had not shown it to be unreasonable or inconsistent with solicitation); *CACI, Inc.--Fed.*,

B-422774, B-422774.2, Oct. 18, 2024, 2024 CPD ¶ 257 at 15-16 (denying challenge to awardee's personnel where protest was based, in part, on "a selective and incomplete reading" of record).

Next, specific to one of the three SMEs--key person O, Cydecor argues the agency misevaluated SAIC's proposal by "giving credit for non-existent credentials." Comments & Supp. Protest at 10. Relevant here, the solicitation's minimum requirements for the SME key personnel position were 10 "or more years of experience in one or more of the P&R Pool and/or MDoDS Pool functional areas listed in Factor 3 Corporate Experience, as a SME on Professional Services contracts at the task order level." RFP at 109. The solicitation also provided that a graduate degree was "preferred," but did not require this level of education. *Id.* In fact, the solicitation did not set forth any education requirement for the SME key personnel position. *Id.*

The record shows the evaluators noted O had "a PhD in Public Policy, MA in Public Policy and BA in Public Policy," as well as "12+ years of experience" performing as an SME. AR, Tab H.1, SAIC TO Eval. Rpt. at 5. Based on this combination of education and experience, the evaluators assessed a significant strength in SAIC's proposal for O. *Id.* The SSA concurred with the evaluators' assessment, finding that O "easily exceeds the education and experience requirements." AR, Tab G.1, Award Decision at 20. The resume for O included in SAIC's proposal, however, shows that O has only a bachelor's degree, not an MA or PhD. AR, Tab E.2.5, SAIC MATOC Proposal at 10.

Cydecor contends that "contrary to the evaluation finding, this candidate did not exceed the relevant education requirements or meet the preference for a graduate degree." Comments & Supp. Protest at 11. Thus, the protester maintains, the significant strength assessed in SAIC's proposal for O was based on an "objective evaluation error." *Id.* at 12. The agency concedes that the evaluation report "erroneously state[s] [O's] education." 2nd Supp. COS at 1.

As explained above, the solicitation did not set forth any minimum education degree requirement for the SMEs, including O's position. Rather, the solicitation merely stated that a graduate degree was "preferred." RFP at 109. Thus, even if, assuming for the sake of argument, the sole basis for the significant strength assessed in SAIC's proposal for O was the evaluators' erroneous belief that O satisfied the preference for a graduate degree, Cydecor cannot show it was competitively prejudiced by the erroneous assessment of a significant strength for O. In this regard, O would continue to meet the solicitation's only requirement for the SME key position--10 or more years of experience. Additionally, removal of the significant strength for O would still leave SAIC's proposal assessed with 11 significant strengths under the key personnel factor. Thus, SAIC's rating of outstanding would likely remain unchanged, as the solicitation defined this rating as indicating a "proposal meets the requirements . . . contains at least one significant strength" *etc.* RFP at 104. Because correction of this error would not change the relative positions of the two offerors under the key personnel factor, Cydecor's challenge to the agency's evaluation of O provides no basis to sustain the protest. *See e.g., Peraton Inc., B-422585 et al., Aug. 16, 2024, 2024 CPD ¶ 173 at 18*

(denying protest where correction of evaluation error would not materially affect the protester's competitive position).

SAIC's Corporate Experience

For the DRRS task order, the solicitation provided the agency would evaluate the corporate experience submissions for the "functional area Sustainment" from the MDODS portion of offerors' MATOC proposals. RFP at 123. In evaluating corporate experience at the MATOC level, the agency considered similarities in functional areas, complexity, magnitude, and execution circumstances. *Id.* at 112. Specific to the MDODS pool functional area of sustainment, the solicitation provided that offerors should submit up to five projects showing their successful execution of "work regarding the operation and sustainment of the MDoDS (MDoDS or similar Federal Government system)." *Id.* at 116. The solicitation set forth that such work "includes day-to-day program operation, program monitoring, life cycle maintenance, training, help desk services, management support, the program's cybersecurity posture, systems engineering and integration, and system testing necessary to support the evolving and emerging needs of DOD or other federal agencies." *Id.* The solicitation included 11 specific evaluation criteria--listed as criteria "a" through "k"--that encompassed offeror experience providing services such as "system administration for an MDoDS regarding DOD IT [information technology] security requirements"; "database maintenance through technical and analytical services"; "procedures to acquire, install, and test all software to mitigate identified security vulnerabilities"; and "internal and external testing with other systems in the readiness enterprise and providing support testing on all products planned for delivery." *Id.* at 116-117.

The record shows the evaluators assessed 1 significant strength in SAIC's proposal under the corporate experience factor, resulting in an assigned rating of outstanding. AR, Tab H.1, SAIC TO Eval. Rpt. at 7. The evaluators noted that two of SAIC's five projects met all 11 of the sustainment area criteria (a-k), the third project met 10 of the 11 criteria (a-h, j, k), and the fourth and fifth projects met 9 of the 11 criteria (a-f, h, j, k and a-e, g, h, j, k, respectively). *Id.* at 8. The evaluators concluded that SAIC's experience "has significant merit and more than exceeds" the evaluation criteria, providing "a high-level of confidence regarding the offeror's full understanding of the contract requirements." *Id.*

Cydecor contends that "SAIC did not deserve an 'Outstanding' rating for Factor 3, Corporate Experience, as its DRRS experience does not go beyond minor help desk work," and that this work "should get them no better than an Acceptable rating." Protest at 19-20. The protester asserts that only one of SAIC's five submitted projects included DRRS work. Comments & Supp. Protest at 9. Further, the protester maintains that "although Cydecor and SAIC received the same Outstanding adjectival rating, [Cydecor's] corporate experience is far from comparable" because all five of Cydecor's projects met each of the evaluation criteria a-k while only two of SAIC's projects did so. *Id.* at 7-8 (citing AR, Tab G.1, Award Decision at 24, 39).

The agency describes Cydecors protest as “insinuat[ing] that only DRRS specific Corporate Experience could be considered for Factor 3, which is not accurate.” COS at 21. The agency explains the evaluators “concluded that SAIC demonstrated relevant qualifications and experience in similar environments, and that its performance under comparable systems was a strong indicator of its ability to manage the DRRS task order.” *Id.*

Based on the record here, we find the protester’s contentions unavailing for two reasons. First, contrary to what Cydecors argument would suggest, the solicitation did not limit the evaluation of corporate experience to only DRRS work. Rather, the RFP permitted offerors to submit projects for a variety of types of MDODS or similar federal government systems. Second, nothing in the solicitation provided that the highest rating would be reserved for only offerors that submitted five experience projects meeting each of the evaluation criteria (a-k). Nor, as our decisions have explained, is there any requirement that an agency reserve the highest possible experience or past performance ratings for an incumbent offeror. *Candor Solutions, LLC, supra* at 15; *CACI, Inc.--Fed.*, B-420729.2, *supra* at 9-10 n.8. Cydecors challenge to the agency’s evaluation of SAIC’s corporate experience presents nothing more than the protester’s disagreement with the agency’s evaluation judgments, and as such, it is denied.⁷ *IPlus, Inc.*, B-298020, B-298020.2, June 5, 2006, 2006 CPD ¶ 90 at 12 (denying protest where protester’s disagreement with agency’s evaluation of awardee’s corporate experience and past performance provided no basis to challenge the evaluation); *Enterprise Servs., LLC, et al.*, B-415368.2 *et al.*, Jan. 4, 2018, 2018 CPD ¶ 44 at 9 (denying challenge to evaluation of awardee’s corporate experience where protester essentially asked us to conduct our own evaluation in place of the agency’s).

⁷ The protester presents additional arguments based on its experience working alongside SAIC in the DRRS space where “SAIC has provided help desk services since September 2023.” Protest at 20. Cydecors arguments are essentially that SAIC has performed in a way that creates risk and, allegedly, has “abdicated” or “offloaded” some of its work to Cydecor personnel. *Id.* In the protester’s opinion, “[t]his demonstrates that SAIC is unable to provide Tier 2 [help desk] support without Cydecor, and lacks any experience of doing so.” *Id.* SAIC, as the intervenor, takes issue with Cydecors representations, characterizing them as “false,” “inflammatory and baseless,” “vague and unsupported,” and created “out of whole cloth.” Intervenor Comments at 18 and 18 n.7. We need not ascertain the factual basis, or lack thereof, for Cydecors claims regarding SAIC’s performance, however, because even if true the arguments are not relevant to the agency’s evaluation of SAIC’s corporate experience, which focuses on whether an offeror has actually performed similar work. Rather, the allegations go to SAIC’s past performance, which focuses on the quality of work performed and was an evaluation factor only at the MATOC level, not at the DRRS task order level. RFP at 101, 123; see e.g., *Ausley Assocs., Inc.*, B-417509 *et al.*, July 24, 2019, 2019 CPD ¶ 279 at 3 (finding no merit to protester’s allegations of awardee’s deficient performance where solicitation provided for evaluation of corporate experience but did not provide for evaluation of past performance; *IBM Corp.*, B-415798, Mar. 27, 2018, 2018 CPD ¶ 130 at 5-6.

Best-Value Source Selection Decision

Additionally, the protester presents four challenges to the agency's best-value source selection decision. First, Cydecor asserts "the multiple, prejudicial evaluation errors detailed in [the protest] necessarily rendered the best value analysis unreliable." Protest at 21. This allegation is derivative of the protester's challenges to the agency's evaluation of quotations. As discussed above, we find no basis to object to the agency's evaluation. Accordingly, this allegation does not establish a basis to question the agency's source selection decision. *Innovative Mgmt. Concepts, Inc., supra* at 17.

Second, the protester contends "the best value analysis treated Cydecor and SAIC as equal under the Corporate Experience and Key Personnel factors based on the Outstanding ratings both offerors received" without "looking behind the adjectival ratings." Protest at 21. Had the SSA looked behind the ratings, the protester maintains, the agency would have recognized that Cydecor's ratings of outstanding were better than SAIC's ratings of outstanding because Cydecor offered significant advantages over SAIC under both factors. *Id.* at 22-23. In other words, the protester argues the SSA failed to realize that Cydecor's ratings of outstanding were a "bluer shade of blue" than SAIC's.⁸ Comments & Supp. Protest at 18-19. The agency responds that the record demonstrates "that GSA did not rely solely on numeric or adjectival ratings." COS at 23. We disagree.

Here, the "Comparative Analysis" section of the award decision begins with a table showing the two offerors' ratings, followed by a second table showing a comparison of SAIC's price to the government estimate. AR, Tab G.1, Award Decision at 47. Then, the text of the "Comparative Analysis" beneath the two tables reads in its entirety:

SAIC: For Evaluation of Task Order Specific Technical Approach, the TEB [technical evaluation board] assigned a Combined Technical/Risk rating of "OUTSTANDING". SAIC has a higher rating than CYDECOR for this criterion.

SAIC: For Evaluation Factor 2--Key Personnel, the TEB assigned a Combined Technical/Risk rating of "OUTSTANDING." SAIC and CYDECOR have equal ratings for this criterion.

SAIC: For Evaluation Factor 3--Corporate Experience, MDoDS Sustainment, the TEB assigned a Combined Technical/Risk Rating of "OUTSTANDING." SAIC and CYDECOR have equal Ratings for this criterion.

⁸ The protester's comment refers to the color designated with each of the adjectival ratings. In this instance, the rating of outstanding is associated with the color blue. RFP at 104.

CYDECOR: For Evaluation of Task Order Specific Technical Approach, the TEB assigned a Combined Technical/Risk rating of “Acceptable”. CYDECOR has a lower rating than SAIC for this criterion.

CYDECOR: For Evaluation Factor 2--Key Personnel, the TEB assigned a Combined Technical/Risk rating of “OUTSTANDING.” CYDECOR and SAIC have equal ratings for this criterion.

CYDECOR: For Evaluation Factor 3--Corporate Experience, the TEB assigned a Combined Technical/Risk Rating of “OUTSTANDING.” CYDECOR and SAIC have equal ratings for this criterion.

Id. at 47-48 (emphasis omitted). Nowhere in this section is there any comparative analysis. Nor is there any comparative analysis in the preceding pages which set forth detailed narrative evaluations for the two offerors individually, but do not assess them *vis-à-vis* one another, in any fashion. *See generally id.* at 13-40. Based on the record before us, we find no support for the agency’s assertion that it conducted a comparative assessment. However, as explained below, there was no need for the agency to do so because the solicitation advised that issuance of the task order would use an HTRO-RP award methodology.⁹

Third, the protester argues the agency improperly assigned weights to the three non-price factors, rather than considering the factors to be of equal importance, as required by the solicitation. Protest at 23. The protester claims the agency’s unreasonable placement of “greatest weight on the one factor where Cydecor received a lower adjectival rating” compounded the SSA’s failure to “consider Cydecor’s superior underlying merits under the other two evaluation factors.” *Id.* at 24. The contemporaneous record reflects--and the agency admits--that GSA weighted the three non-price evaluation factors, rather than treating them as equal, and that GSA considered task order technical approach to be the most important factor. AR, Tab G.1, Award Decision at 5; COS at 14-15, 17. The agency maintains, however, that this weighting was consistent with the solicitation. The agency’s position is an unreasonable interpretation of the solicitation.

⁹ We note there is some potential tension between the solicitation’s use of adjectival ratings, as opposed to point scores, combined with an HTRO-RP award methodology. For example, although it is not the factual scenario presently before us, if Cydecor and SAIC both had received ratings of outstanding for all three non-price factors, the solicitation is silent as to how the agency would have broken such an apparent tie in the ratings to determine which proposal was the highest technically rated. While agencies generally may not need to conduct a comparative analysis of proposals when using an HTRO-RP award methodology, in the event of a tie in the adjectival ratings, a comparative analysis may be the only way to determine which proposal is the highest technically rated, unless the solicitation expressly provides for some alternate tie breaking method.

When parties disagree over the meaning of solicitation language, we will resolve the matter by reading the solicitation as a whole and in a manner that gives effect to all of its provisions. *Resicum Int'l LLC*, B-421383, Mar. 22, 2023, 2023 CPD ¶ 75 at 4. To be reasonable, and therefore valid, an interpretation must be consistent with the solicitation when read as a whole and in a reasonable manner. *Id.*; *Patronus Sys., Inc.*, B-418784, B-418784.2, Sept. 3, 2020, 2020 CPD ¶ 291 at 5.

As explained above, this solicitation was for the simultaneous award of two pools of MATOCs and three seed task orders. Solicitation section M.3.2 set forth the “MATOC Basis of Award” and section M.3.3 set forth the “Task Order Basis of Award.” RFP at 101-102. In section M.3.2, the solicitation provided that MATOCs would be evaluated using the procedures of FAR subpart 15.3, the award basis would be HTRO-RP “considering four non-price evaluation factors in descending order of importance,” with technical approach being the most important factor. *Id.* at 101. Section M.3.3 provided that task orders would be evaluated and awarded using the procedures of FAR section 16.505, that acquisition teams would develop “evaluation procedures for task order awards,” and would be permitted to select the award basis best-suited for each particular task order (e.g., HTRO-RP, LPTA, tradeoff). *Id.* at 102. Relevant here, for the particular DRRS task order at issue, the solicitation included three evaluation factors, identified as: corporate experience; key personnel; task order specific technical approach. *Id.* at 123-124. The RFP, however, did not advise that the evaluation factors were listed in any order of importance. *Id.*

In attempting to defend its position that the solicitation allowed for the weighting of task order technical approach as the most important factor, GSA cites to section M.3.2. MOL at 1. The agency maintains “the descending order of importance for the evaluation factors were incorporated into DRRS Task Order because the SEEDs were part of the MATOC and the MATOC and SEED proposals were in response to a single solicitation for PRISM.” *Id.* at 1-2. The agency, however, cannot point to any language in the solicitation that either explicitly or implicitly indicates the evaluation factors and weighting from the MATOC level awards were to be flowed down to the task order level awards. Rather, GSA advances a position that is entirely disconnected from the plain language of the solicitation, which clearly established two different bases of evaluation and award for the MATOCs and task orders--one rooted in FAR part 15 with four evaluation factors listed in descending order of importance, and the second rooted in FAR subpart 16.5 with evaluation factors and award methodology to be determined on a task order-by-task order basis. *Compare* RFP at 101 *with* RFP at 102. Moreover, even if we were to accept the agency’s position that the descending order of importance language from the MATOC section M.3.2 flowed down to the task order award--which we do not--the task order technical approach factor would be the least important, rather than the most important factor for the DRRS task order, as it was the last of the three evaluation factors listed for the DRRS task order. RFP at 123-124.

Here, the solicitation did not establish weighting for the DRRS task order’s three non-price evaluation factors. RFP at 123-124. When a solicitation does not disclose the relative weight of evaluation factors or subfactors, they are assumed to be of

approximately equal importance. *Gunnison Consulting Group, Inc.*, B-418876 *et al.*, Oct. 5, 2020, 2020 CPD ¶ 344 at 9. As the agency concedes that it considered the evaluation factors in a weighted order of importance, rather than of equal importance, we find the agency used a weighting scheme that was inconsistent with the solicitation. As explained below, however, we conclude this error was non-prejudicial.

Fourth, and finally, the protester claims the various errors in the best-value source selection process were exacerbated by the SSA's incorrect understanding of the rating assigned to Cydecor's proposal by the evaluators under the task order technical approach factor. Comments & Supp. Protest at 24-25. The evaluators assigned Cydecor a rating of good, but the SSA treated the protester's proposal as having received a rating of acceptable. *Id.* (citing AR, Tab G.1, Award Decision at 27-28, 47-48). The agency maintains the SSA's misstated rating was a typographical error, and the post-award correction of this error "did not affect the outcome of the evaluation." COS at 18; *see also* Tab F.1.2, Cydecor Unsuccessful Offeror Notice--Amendment at 1. Again, the agency's position is not based on a reasonable reading of the contemporaneous record.

Rather than being a single instance of a typographical error where the SSA incorrectly stated Cydecor received a technical rating of acceptable, but otherwise correctly noted Cydecor's actual rating of good, the *only* rating cited throughout the award decision by the SSA for Cydecor's task order technical approach factor is a rating of acceptable. AR, Tab G.1, Award Decision at 3, 26-28, 47-48. As such, the contemporaneous documentation demonstrates that, when making the best-value source selection decision, the SSA had an incorrect understanding of Cydecor's technical rating as being one rating level lower than it was.

In sum, with respect to making the best-value source selection decision, we conclude that the SSA: did not look behind the adjectival ratings; used the wrong factor weighting scheme; and had an incorrect understanding of Cydecor's rating for the task order technical approach factor. We do not, however, find that these errors competitively prejudiced the protester. As our decisions have consistently stated, competitive prejudice is an essential element of every viable protest, without which our Office will not sustain a protest.

Here, the solicitation established an HTRO-RP award method for the DRRS task order. RFP at 123. Thus, the agency maintains, because both offerors received ratings of outstanding under the key personnel and corporate experience factors, task order technical approach would still be the determining factor, and SAIC still would have "achieved the higher rating overall" even if the factors were all weighted equally. COS at 23; MOL at 5. Additionally, the intervenor contends "there is no merit to an argument that the agency was required to consider the within-rating differences between proposals because, in a 'highest technically rated at a fair and reasonable price' procurement, SAIC's advantage of a full adjectival rating under the Technical factor more than overcame any potential between-rating differences." Intervenor Comments at 24 n.11, *see also* at 26.

Based on the record here, we conclude that even if the SSA had understood that Cydecor received a rating of good (not acceptable) for the task order technical approach factor, looked behind the adjectival ratings, and treated the ratings of equal importance (rather than weighting them), Cydecor would not have had a substantial chance of receiving the award under the HTRO-RP award methodology established by the solicitation. As discussed above, many of the discriminators the protester maintains make its ratings of outstanding a “bluer shade of blue” than SAIC’s ratings of outstanding for the key personnel and corporate experience factor are based on Cydecor’s incumbency, for which the agency was not required to assign extra credit. Similarly, above we found no merit in the protester’s incumbency-based argument that its proposal merited a rating of outstanding, rather than good, under the task order technical approach factor. Further, the protester has not established that the agency unreasonably assigned SAIC’s proposal ratings of outstanding under all three non-price factors. Rather, the record shows the evaluators reasonably assessed at least 11 significant strengths in SAIC’s proposal under the key personnel factor as well as 1 significant strength under the corporate experience factor, based on which the agency assigned SAIC’s proposal ratings of outstanding for these factors. Accordingly, we find the errors committed by the agency in making the best-value source selection decision did not competitively prejudice Cydecor, because even if those errors were corrected SAIC’s proposal would remain the highest technically rated.

The protest is denied.

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General Counsel