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# Decision

**Matter of:** Ascella Technologies Inc.

**File:** B-412679; B-412679.2

**Date:** April 27, 2016

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Barry J. Hurewitz, Esq., and Carla Weiss, Esq., WilmerHale LLP, for the protester. Todd R. Overman, Esq., Richard W. Arnholt, Esq., and Bryan R. King, Esq., Bass Berry & Sims, PLC, for Summit2Sea Consulting, LLC, an intervenor. Claire Little, Esq., and Terry G. Stenerson, Esq., Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, for the agency. Scott H. Riback, Esq., and Tania Calhoun, Esq., Office of the General Counsel, GAO, participated in the preparation of the decision.

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## DIGEST

Protest alleging that agency improperly applied an unstated evaluation criterion in evaluating protester's quotation is denied where record shows that agency evaluated quotations reasonably and in a manner consistent with the solicitation's evaluation factors, as well as applicable statutes and regulations.

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## DECISION

Ascella Technologies, Inc., of Arlington, Virginia, protests the issuance of a task order to Summit2Sea Consulting, LLC, of Arlington, Virginia, under that firm's Federal Supply Schedule contract under request for quotations (RFQ) No. HR0011-15-Q-0009, issued by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) for information technology business support services. Ascella maintains that the agency miscalculated quotations in connection with its issuance of the task order to Summit2Sea.

We deny the protest in part and dismiss it in part.

## BACKGROUND

The RFQ contemplates the issuance, on a best-value basis, of a fixed-price task order to provide the solicited services for a base year and four 1-year option periods. The RFQ advised offerors that the agency would evaluate quotations considering price, as well as the following four non-price factors, listed in

descending order of importance: technical excellence, management capability, personnel qualifications, and past performance.<sup>1</sup> RFQ at 5-6. The solicitation advised that, although the non-price factors were each more important than price, the importance of price would increase as the relative merit of the quotations under the non-price factors became more equal. Id.

In response to the RFQ, the agency received three quotations. The agency evaluated the quotations and assigned the following rating to them:

<b>Vendor</b>	<b>Technical Excellence</b>	<b>Management Capability</b>	<b>Personnel Qualifications</b>	<b>Past Performance</b>	<b>Price</b>
Ascella	Acceptable	Good	Good	Substantial Confidence	\$23,974,193
Summit2Sea	Outstanding	Good	Outstanding <sup>2</sup>	Substantial Confidence	\$28,754,195
Vendor A	Good	Good	Acceptable	Substantial Confidence	\$22,378,468

AR, exh. 23, SSDD, at 6. On the basis of these evaluation results, the agency issued a task order to Summit2Sea, finding that its quotation represented the best value to the government. After being advised of the agency's selection decision and receiving a brief explanation of the reasons that it was not selected, Ascella filed this protest.

## PROTEST

Ascella alleges that the agency misevaluated both its quotation, as well as the quotation of Summit2Sea. We have carefully considered all of Ascella's contentions

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<sup>1</sup> In performing its evaluation of quotations, the agency assigned adjectival ratings of outstanding, good, acceptable, marginal or unacceptable under the technical excellence, management capability, and personnel qualifications factors. For past performance, the agency made relevancy determinations with respect to the past performance examples submitted by the vendors, and assigned adjectival ratings of substantial confidence, satisfactory confidence, limited confidence, no confidence or unknown confidence. Agency Report (AR) exh. 23, Source Selection Decision Document (SSDD), at 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> The record shows that the agency technical evaluators assigned the Summit2Sea quotation a rating of good under the personnel qualifications factor, and the source selection authority disagreed with that rating and changed it to outstanding. AR, exh. 23, SSDD, at 6, 11-12.

and find no basis to object to the agency's evaluation. We discuss our conclusions below.

#### Application of an Unstated Evaluation Factor

Ascella maintains that the agency applied an unstated evaluation criterion when it evaluated the protester's quotation under the technical excellence evaluation factor. The RFQ provided that quotations would be evaluated under the technical excellence factor based on the following narrative provision:

The Offeror will be evaluated to determine the extent to which the Offeror demonstrates an understanding of the Performance Work Statement, Attachment 1 of the RFQ. The Offeror's plan should demonstrate requisite experience and expertise in supporting Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) accounting systems and interfaces. The Plan shall be evaluated to determine the extent to which the Offeror demonstrates experience and expertise in providing business architecture support and software development. The Plan shall be evaluated to determine the extent to which the Offeror demonstrates their ability to provide an applications helpdesk. The Offeror will be evaluated on their ability to provide surge support.

RFQ at 5. According to the protester, the agency unreasonably downgraded its quotation--assigning it only an acceptable, rather than a higher, rating--for failing to provide details of its approach to accomplishing various aspects of the requirement. Ascella argues that the RFQ did not require such details, but only required Ascella to demonstrate its experience, expertise and understanding of the agency's requirement.

We find no merit to this allegation. In reviewing protests challenging an agency's evaluation of quotations or proposals, our Office does not reevaluate the quotations or proposals, or substitute our judgment for that of the agency; rather, we review the record to determine whether the agency's evaluation was reasonable and consistent with the solicitation's evaluation criteria, as well as applicable statutes and regulations. FP-FAA Seattle, LLC, B-411544, B-411544.2, Aug. 26, 2015, 2015 CPD ¶ 274 at 7. While solicitations must inform offerors of the basis for quotation or proposal evaluation, and the evaluation must be based on the factors set forth in the solicitation, agencies are not required specifically to list every area that may be taken into account, provided such areas are reasonably related to, or encompassed by, the stated criteria. MicroTechnologies LLC, B-403713.6, June 9, 2011, 2012 CPD ¶ 131 at 3.

Here, the RFQ specifically advised firms that their quotations would be evaluated to determine the extent to which they demonstrated an understanding of the performance work statement (PWS). RFQ at 5. It is axiomatic that demonstrating

an understanding of the PWS necessarily involves the vendor detailing the actions and approaches it intends to use to accomplish performing the agency's requirement.

Ascella has not taken issue with any of the agency's substantive evaluation findings made in connection with various elements of the PWS, and apparently believes instead that it was not required to provide any information beyond generalized representations concerning its experience, expertise and understanding of the agency's requirements. However, the record shows that the agency made a number of reasonable, specific evaluation findings where Ascella simply failed to provide any information concerning how it would accomplish certain of the solicitation's requirements. The record shows that Ascella failed to provide any details for how it would maintain standard operating procedures and work instructions, as required by PWS element C.1.2.a; failed to provide any information about a transition out plan, as required by PWS element C.1.2.c; failed to describe a plan to install desktop software, as required by PWS element E.1.1.c; failed to describe a plan for annual account review, as required by PWS element E.1.1.g; and failed to address software configuration and turnover, as required by PWS element D.1.1.d. AR, exh. 30, Technical Evaluation Report, at 7.

The agency also found more generally that Ascella did not provide an approach or detailed plan for how it would manage the agency's enterprise resource planning (ERP) computing environment. The evaluators specifically found:

The Quoter failed to provide an approach or detailed plan of how they would provide a "strategic roadmap" to integrate new ERP functionality and to sunset legacy applications. They state they will create a "strategic roadmap" and "enterprise level design for DARPA's ERP environment using our functional and technical experience with the technologies outlined in the applications list" (Section 1.2.2 pg. 5) but do not provide an approach or methodology of how they will perform this task. As the Government adopts new features of the . . . ERP system, documentation and an approach (e.g. fit/gap analysis) for sunsetting legacy systems is necessary. There could be moderate risk to the Government without more insight of how the roadmap will be constructed.

AR, exh. 30, Technical Evaluation Report, at 6-7. Ascella also does not take issue substantively with this evaluation finding.

We conclude that the agency's evaluation findings are reasonable and consistent with the RFQ's technical excellence evaluation factor. The RFQ specifically required the vendors to demonstrate an understanding of the PWS in particular, and more generally required the vendors to demonstrate their experience and expertise in supporting the ERP system and interfaces, and providing business architecture

support and software development services. The mere fact that the RFQ's evaluation factor did not use the terms "detail" or "approach" did not preclude the agency from evaluating the adequacy of Ascella's quotation in terms of the level of detail provided, or the adequacy of its offered approach. We therefore deny this aspect of Ascella's protest.

#### Challenges to the Agency's Evaluation of Summit2Sea's Quotation

Ascella also takes issue with various evaluation findings that the agency made in connection with its review of the Summit2Sea quotation. We dismiss these allegations because we conclude that Ascella is not an interested party to maintain these arguments. In this connection, our Bid Protest Regulations require a protester to be an "interested party," that is, an offeror or vendor with a direct economic interest in the award of a contract (or issuance of a task order) or the failure to award a contract (or issue a task order). 4 C.F.R. §§ 21.0(a)(1), 21.1(a).

Here, the record shows that Vendor A was evaluated as technically superior compared to Ascella under the technical excellence factor (the most important evaluation factor), and also quoted a lower price. AR, exh. 23, SSDD, at 6. The record also shows that the agency's source selection authority expressly ranked Vendor A as second in terms of the agency's selection of a contractor ahead of Ascella. *Id.* at 19. Thus, even if Ascella's allegations concerning Summit2Sea were correct, Vendor A, rather than Ascella, would be next in line for issuance of the task order. We therefore dismiss Ascella's remaining allegations.

The protest is denied in part and dismissed in part.

Susan A. Poling  
General Counsel