

COMMENTARY

5 ways to shape how agencies pick winning proposals

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Agencies have broad discretion in establishing evaluation criteria for their procurements, subject to some limitations set by federal acquisition regulations. Those criteria are often shaped by arguments that competing contractors make during the procurement's capture phase. Here are some ideas to consider in shaping the evaluation criteria in your next must-win procurement.

Factors and subfactors

Every procurement must be evaluated based on evaluation factors and subfactors established before the release of the request for proposals. The government tailors those factors and subfactors to represent areas of importance for source selection and provide a basis for meaningful comparison among competing proposals. Agencies have broad discretion in establishing evaluation factors and subfactors and determining the relative importance of those factors. As a capture manager, you want to discuss those factors and their relative importance and offer guidance to the agency, if requested.

Technical, management and other evaluation factors

Noncost evaluation factors must be established to assess the quality of proposed solutions, services or products. Those factors can include technical approach, management capability, personnel qualifications, prior experience or small-business participation, among others. Some agencies prescribe a standard set of evaluation factors for their procurements and then add factors specific to a procurement as needed. As a capture manager, you want to know what factors are required and what optional factors the agency might consider. After an agency selects factors, it tailors subfactors for each one to outline important considerations in the procurement and provide a basis for comparing bidders. Agencies have broad discretion to set subfactors for each procurement.

Past-performance evaluation factor

Past performance is a mandatory evaluation factor, and agencies must include it in every procurement that exceeds the value of the simplified acquisition threshold, unless the contracting officer specifically excludes it. The agency describes its approach to evaluating past performance and usually requires bidders to provide past-performance contract summaries for relevant contracts of similar size, scope and complexity. Past-performance selection criteria can be defined broadly or narrowly. For example, past-performance contract references might be restricted to contracts performed or completed in the past three years. Narrow definitions can eliminate some excellent contracts from being presented as past-performance examples.

For procurements that offer a significant opportunity for subcontracting, past-performance evaluation must include an assessment of how well the bidder met applicable small-business goals in previous contracts that required subcontracting plans.

Price as an evaluation factor

Price is a mandatory evaluation factor for contracts, including best-value procurements. However, its relative importance can vary. For example, when mission success is important to the agency, the relative importance of price in the evaluation criteria can be lowered in comparison with other evaluation factors. For commodity procurements or nontechnical services, the relative importance of price could increase. In the extreme, some procurements raise the relative importance of price to such a high level that the RFP will state, "Award will be made to the technically acceptable, lowest price (TALP) offeror." That TALP evaluation criteria should never be

used for technical or professional services. The RFP will state that all evaluation factors, when taken together, are significantly more important than, equal to or significantly less important than price.

Capture manager's role in shaping the evaluation criteria

Capture managers should not leave evaluation factors and subfactors to chance. After an agency releases an RFP, those factors and subfactors are set and cannot be changed without considerable effort on the part of the agency. Shaping evaluation factors to highlight important considerations in a procurement can make the difference between your company being a winner or a loser.

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