

Source Selection Decision
Science, Technology and Research Support Services II (STARSS II)
RFP: NNL10310923R

On November 5, 2010 the STARSS II Source Evaluation Board (SEB) presented its Findings for the Request for Proposals (RFP), NNL10310923R, for the Science, Technology and Research Support Services II (STARSS II) procurement.

Background

The STARSS II contract will provide support to NASA Langley Research Center science programs and related engineering activities. Work requirements encompass a broad scope of science missions and responsibilities of the Langley Research Center's science, technology, research and related applications programs. All work assignments will be made by the issuance of Task Orders (TOs).

Market research was conducted using a Sources Sought Synopsis on the NASA Acquisition Internet Service (NAIS) and FedBizOpps websites. There were eighteen respondents to the Sources Sought Synopsis. A Procurement Strategy Meeting was held on November 24, 2009 at NASA HQ, Washington DC and the procurement strategy was subsequently approved. The procurement was conducted as a competitive, 100% small business set-aside acquisition. A Draft Request for Proposal (DRFP) was issued on April 27, 2010 for comments from industry. A Pre-Solicitation Conference was conducted on May 10, 2010 and eleven companies attended.

The STARSS II procurement will result in an award to the Offeror who presents the best value to the Government based on the evaluation of Mission Suitability, Cost/Price and Past Performance factors. The best value Offeror will be awarded an Indefinite Delivery/Indefinite Quantity (ID/IQ) type contract with a maximum value of \$425M. Cost-Plus Award Fee task orders will be awarded. The period of performance will be five years from the contract effective date.

The RFP was issued on June 4, 2010, with a request for the Past Performance Volume to be submitted by June 29, 2010 and a proposal response date of July 12, 2010. Subsequently, three amendments followed: Amendment 1 was issued on June 17, 2010 updating responses to industry questions on the solicitation without any changes to the solicitation. Amendment 2 was issued on June 18, 2010, providing interested parties with the referenced regulations and directive listed in the Safety and Health Plan Instructions since the hyperlinks were not accessible to the public. The solicitation remained unchanged. The following companies responded to the RFP:

Engineering Research and Consulting Incorporated (ERC Inc.)
Sigma Space Corporation (Sigma)
Science Systems and Applications Inc. (SSAI)

Amendment 3 was issued on August 9, 2010, only to the three firms which submitted proposals, updating Exhibit A-Statement of Work with an additional subparagraph, 3.5 Space Mission/Payload/Instrument Operations. Offerors were permitted to submit two additional pages for the Technical Volume and one page to the Past Performance Volume with a response date of August 18, 2010. All three Offerors submitted revisions in accordance with the amendment. On August 25, 2010, Sigma Space Corp. submitted an unsolicited revision to its proposal which was not accepted by the Government because it was received after the time specified for receipt of proposals. The Contracting

Officer promptly notified Sigma Space Corp. that the unsolicited proposal revision was not accepted and remained sealed with the other contractual documents.

Evaluation Factors

The appointed SEB conducted an evaluation of proposals received in response to the RFP. The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the evaluation factors contained in Section M of the RFP. The RFP set forth the following three evaluation factors:

Factor 1: Mission Suitability

Factor 2: Cost/Price

Factor 3: Past Performance

The RFP specified the adjectival ratings, definitions and percentile ranges in accordance with NFS 1815.305 and stated that these would be used to evaluate the Mission Suitability Subfactors.

The Mission Suitability Subfactors and the weights assigned are as follows:

Subfactor 1 Understanding the Requirements and Technical Approach (URTA)	500
Subfactor 2 Management (MGMT)	400
Subfactor 3 Safety and Health (S&H)	100

The RFP stated the contract would be awarded to the Offeror whose proposal represents the best value to the Government based on the evaluation of Mission Suitability, Cost/Price and Past Performance. The RFP also provided that award could be made without discussions (RFP Section L.15 (d)(1)). Each evaluation factor was essentially equal in importance, and all evaluation factors other than Cost/Price, when combined, were significantly more important than Cost/Price.

Factor 1 – Mission Suitability

The SEB used the following adjectival and numerical ratings to evaluate the Mission Suitability Factor (NFS 1815.305)

ADJECTIVAL RATING	DEFINITIONS	PERCENTILE RANGE
Excellent	A comprehensive and thorough proposal of exceptional merit with one or more significant strengths. No deficiency or significant weakness exists.	91-100
Very Good	A proposal having no deficiency and which demonstrates over-all competence. One or more significant strengths have been found, and strengths outbalance any weaknesses that exist.	71-90
Good	A proposal having no deficiency and which shows a reasonably sound response. There may be strengths or weaknesses, or both. As a whole, weaknesses not off-set by	51-70

	strengths do not significantly detract from the Offeror's response.	
Fair	A proposal having no deficiency and which has one or more weaknesses. Weaknesses outbalance any strengths.	31-50
Poor	A proposal that has one or more deficiencies or significant weaknesses that demonstrate a lack of overall competence or would require a major proposal revision to correct.	0-30

Definitions: The definitions for classification of findings are defined as follows:

The definitions for Deficiency, Weakness, and Significant Weakness are required to be used as defined in FAR Part 15.001 as follows:

Deficiency is a material failure of a proposal to meet a Government requirement or a combination of significant weaknesses in a proposal that increases the risk of unsuccessful contract performance to an unacceptable level.

Weakness means a flaw in the proposal that increases the risk of unsuccessful contract performance.

Significant Weakness in the proposal is a flaw that appreciably increases the risk of unsuccessful contract performance.

The definitions for Strength and Significant Strength are not in the FAR, however, the following definitions were used:

Strength An aspect of the proposal that enhances the potential for successful contract performance.

Significant Strength An aspect of the proposal that appreciably enhances the potential for successful contract performance.

Factor 2 – Cost/Price

The RFP does not provide for adjectival ratings or numerical scores under the Cost/Price Factor; however, the RFP provides evaluation language within Section M, as follows:

NASA will conduct an analysis of the proposed cost to determine its reasonableness, acceptability and extent to which it reflects performance and resources addressed in the technical proposal. In addition, NASA will perform an analysis of the proposed cost elements and fee to assess cost realism and the Offeror's capability to accomplish the contract objectives within the cost proposed. This analysis will be conducted in accordance with 1815.305(vi)(a)(1)(B). A lack of resource realism may adversely affect Mission Suitability scores, and result in cost realism adjustments under this cost factor, (NFS 1815.304-70(b)(2)(i)).

Factor 3 – Past Performance

Under the Past Performance Factor the Source Evaluation Board assessed each Offeror's record of performing services that are similar in size, scope and complexity to the requirements of the solicitation. Specifically, the RFP stated that "each of the adjective ratings below has a "performance" component and a "relevance" component. The Offeror must meet the requirements of both components to achieve a particular rating. In assessing relevance, the Government will consider the degree of similarity in size, scope, and complexity to the requirements in this solicitation, as well as how current/recent the past performance is."

Rating Definitions

The SEB used the following confidence level ratings to evaluate the Past Performance Factor (NFS 1815.305):

Very High Level of Confidence

The Offeror's relevant past performance is of exceptional merit and is very highly pertinent to this acquisition; indicating exemplary performance in a timely, efficient, and economical manner; very minor (if any) problems with no adverse effect on overall performance. Based on the Offeror's performance record, there is a very high level of confidence that the Offeror will successfully perform the required effort.

High Level of Confidence

The Offeror's relevant past performance is highly pertinent to this acquisition; demonstrating very effective performance that would be fully responsive to contract requirements with contract requirements accomplished in a timely, efficient, and economical manner for the most part with only minor problems with little identifiable effect on overall performance. Based on the Offeror's performance record, there is a high level of confidence that the Offeror will successfully perform the required effort.

Moderate Level of Confidence

The Offeror's relevant past performance is pertinent to this acquisition, and it demonstrates effective performance; fully responsive to contract requirements; reportable problems, but with little identifiable effect on overall performance. Based on the Offeror's performance record, there is a moderate level of confidence that the Offeror will successfully perform the required effort.

Low Level of Confidence

The Offeror's relevant past performance is at least somewhat pertinent to this acquisition, and it meets or slightly exceeds minimum acceptable standards; adequate results; reportable problems with identifiable, but not substantial, effects on overall performance. Based on the Offeror's performance record, there is a low level of confidence that the Offeror will successfully perform the required effort. Changes to the Offeror's existing processes may be necessary in order to achieve contract requirements.

Very Low Level of Confidence

The Offeror's relevant past performance does not meet minimum acceptable standards in one or more areas; remedial action required in one or more areas; problems in one or more areas which, adversely affect overall performance. Based on the Offeror's performance record, there is a very low level of confidence that the Offeror will successfully perform the required effort.

Neutral

In the case of an Offeror without a record of relevant past performance or for whom information on past performance is not available, the Offeror may not be evaluated favorably or unfavorably on past performance [see FAR 15.305(a)(2)(ii) and (iv)].

Evaluation Procedures

The SEB conducted the evaluation of proposals in accordance with Section M of the RFP. The SEB began its evaluation upon receipt of the Past Performance Volumes (Volume III), which were received from the Offerors prior to the proposal due date. The SEB members reviewed each Offeror's Past Performance Proposal, all of the past performance questionnaires, and information obtained from the NASA Past Performance Database (PPDB) and the DoD Past Performance Information Retrieval System (PPIRS) as applicable. The SEB considered all the "performance" and "relevance" findings in assigning an adjectival rating for each Offeror as defined in the RFP. The SEB evaluated each contract that each Offeror submitted by comparing the description of the contract within the Offeror's past performance proposal to the work (by SOW area) on the STARSS II contract. For each STARSS II SOW area, the SEB assessed the pertinence of each submitted contract and assigned a pertinence rating consistent with the pertinence definitions in the NFS. The SEB then assigned an overall pertinence rating for each contract based on an integrated assessment of the size, scope (SOW area ratings) and complexity of each contract in relation to the STARSS II contract. The SEB then utilized these integrated pertinence assessments along with the SEB's assessments of the Offeror's performance ratings to assign an overall past performance confidence level based on the definitions in the NFS.

Upon receipt of the Technical Proposal (Volume I) and the Business Proposal (Volume II), the SEB conducted an initial review of each Technical Proposal and the Cost/Price Analyst reviewed the Business Proposal to determine if any were unacceptable proposals as defined in NASA FAR Supplement 1815.305-70. The Contract Specialist reviewed each model contract, applicable terms and conditions and Representations and Certifications for each Offeror. All proposals were found to be acceptable and warranted a full evaluation.

The SEB members performed a detailed individual review of each of the Offeror's Technical Proposal and documented strengths and weaknesses for each Mission Suitability subfactor. The SEB consultants also independently reviewed specific areas of each proposal relevant to the factor for which they possess subject matter expertise and provided input to the SEB voting members for consideration. After completion of the individual evaluations for each subfactor, the SEB convened to discuss individual Findings and to develop consensus on strengths and weaknesses for each of the Offerors. The SEB then reviewed the Findings for each Offeror to ensure that all proposals were evaluated consistently and objectively. Upon completion of the evaluation of all subfactors for all Offerors, the SEB assigned adjectival ratings and percentage scores to each subfactor based on the consensus Findings, assigning a point score for each subfactor to derive the overall Mission Suitability score in accordance with NFS 1815.305.

The SEB reviewed each Offeror's Business proposal to determine whether the cost proposal was reasonable, realistic and consistent with the technical approach. The cost proposals were assessed to ensure compliance with the Cost/Price evaluation factor. The SEB provided the results of its review to

the NASA Cost/Price Analyst who incorporated the results into the detailed analysis of the Offeror's cost proposals.

The Contracting Officer carefully reviewed the facts presented in the report and discussed the findings with the SEB. In accordance with FAR 52.215-1(f) (4), based on the initial findings of the SEB it was evident that the potential for an award without discussions existed. Therefore, no Competitive Range was determined and the SEB met with me, the Source Selection Authority, on November 5, 2010 to present its findings.

Evaluation Findings

Factor 1 – Mission Suitability

Set forth below is a summary of the Mission Suitability Findings for the three Offerors:

ERC, Inc. (ERC)

ERC Inc. received a Mission Suitability score of 642. ERC's proposal included significant strengths, strengths, weaknesses and significant weaknesses summarized below.

Subfactor 1, Understanding the Requirement and Technical Approach (URTA)

ERC received an adjectival rating of Fair for Subfactor 1. ERC received a significant strength related to Representative Task Order (RTO) #1, by recognizing the task's schedule was aggressive for development of the new technology of the Advance Concept Lidar (ACL) and by proposing contingency plans including de-scope options. ERC's proposal also included strengths for identifying and managing the technical risk associated with the development cycle of the cutting edge, fundamentally new instrumentation, and identifying and managing the staffing risks for long deployment field missions. ERC also received a strength for RTO #1 which demonstrated a sound understanding of ACL development and deployment and a strength for RTO #2 which demonstrated a thorough discussion of the complex nature of the Differential Absorption Lidar (DIAL) measurement.

ERC's proposal contained two significant weaknesses. One significant weakness related to lack of demonstrated technical understanding of the requirements for two significant elements of the SOW, specifically areas 3.0, Science Analysis Support and 5.0, Instrument Development. The Offeror often identified uniformly generic risks and simplistic management approaches to mitigate risks. The second significant weakness related to a lack of understanding of the Atmospheric Science Data Center (ASDC). This was also based on generic risks and the omission of significant risks. ERC's proposal also contained additional weaknesses including: An inadequate risk mitigation strategy related to utilization of a suite of experts who lacked the necessary expertise; the proposal did not adequately address safety and security risks associated with field missions; the technical response to RTO #1 contained an incorrect assumption related to Single Scatter Albedo (SSA) and a flaw in the receiver sample rate; the technical response to RTO #1 did not contain adequate administrative staffing required for field missions; the technical response to RTO #1 did not demonstrate an understanding of the computer processing power required for field missions; the technical response to RTO # 2 subtask 2 did not provide adequate detail

on the retrieval of atmosphere gas concentration profiles; and the technical response to RTO #2 demonstrated a misunderstanding of how instrument data is transmitted from the satellite to the ASDC.

Subfactor 2, Management (MGMT)

ERC received an adjectival rating of Very Good for Subfactor 2. ERC received a significant strength for its effective strategy to assure that highly qualified professional employees are attracted and retained by providing innovative methods to ensure that a quality staff continues to improve. ERC's proposal also contained a number of strengths including: Leadership training for management and supervisors; programs to provide monetary incentives for performance and process improvement including sharing of a specified percentage of earned award fee with employees; an approach for managing Foreign Nationals; cooperative education program to enhance recruiting and retaining highly qualified professional employees; a total compensation plan with retirement plan flexibility; and, a standardized approach for contract phase-in.

ERC's proposal contained a significant weakness for its approach to identifying, mitigating and/or avoiding the three types of Organization Conflicts of Interests (OCI's) during contract performance. ERC's proposal also included a number of weaknesses including: The proposed key person lacked experience in atmospheric science; the proposal lacked rationale for two full time key positions; the proposed organization structure for efficiently managing the work was insufficient and lacked the skill level and quantity of personnel to accommodate all the complex contract functions; the proposed overtime policy did not provide the extent of flexibility considered important for professional employees' retention and to support extended hours to conduct field missions and support the ASDC; the phase-in plan lacked details to ensure all active tasks would be transitioned within schedule; and, the proposal's assessment of the potential for each of the three types of OCIs to arise at time of contract award lacked detail.

Subfactor 3, Safety and Health (S&H)

ERC received an adjectival rating of Good for Subfactor 3. ERC received a strength for a management commitment to attain and maintain a safety certification under the LaRC STARSS II contract.

Sigma Space Corporation (Sigma)

Sigma received a Mission Suitability score of 465. Sigma's proposal contained strengths, weaknesses and significant weaknesses summarized below.

Subfactor 1, Understanding the Requirement and Technical Approach (URTA)

Sigma received an adjectival rating of Fair for Subfactor 1. Sigma's proposal contained no significant strengths but included strengths for: Sound technical understanding of instrument development based on identification of risks related to instrument and software documentation; and, demonstrated technical understanding of ASDC data integrity and availability risks, and well thought out ideas for maintaining those abilities during hardware failure. Sigma received strengths for RTO #1 based on its discussion of lidar system development and for technical understanding of software tools and mission deployment procedures. Sigma received strengths for RTO #2 for understanding of the ISS environment and for the technical approach for validation of ISS lidar aerosol and molecular profile data.

Sigma's proposal contained two significant weaknesses. The proposal reflected a lack of technical understanding of the Statement of Work (SOW) based on an inadequate approach to clearly identify and prioritize significant technical risks. The proposal also reflected a lack of technical understanding by omitting significant technical risks associated with algorithm development and validation.

Sigma's proposal contained additional weaknesses including: Lack of technical understanding by not identifying technical risks for analysis, interpretation, validation and models; lack of identification of risks associated with ITAR and export control in relation to field missions; lack of understanding of the contractor's role in the ASDC; and, lack of identification of risks or an approach associated with hiring specialized technical skills across the SOW areas. The proposal also contained weaknesses in the response to RTO #1 including: Lack of assessment of the risk associated with the Advance Concept Lidar (ACL) development and deployment schedule; lack of technical understanding related to the use of backscatter for calibration; lack of identification of risks associated with development of algorithms given the measurement and the lidar chosen; and, inadequate identification of the appropriate types of personnel and skill classification mix. For RTO #2, the proposal also contained weaknesses including: A lack of technical understanding and detail; inadequate risk assessment; and inadequate identification of the appropriate types of personnel and skill classification mix.

Subfactor 2, Management (MGMT)

Sigma received an adjectival rating of Fair for Subfactor 2. Sigma's proposal contained no significant strengths but included strengths for its management approach including: Its commitment to retain and recruit highly qualified staff by a co-operative education program; an effective recruitment and retention strategy based on sharing of a specified percentage of earned award fee with employees; and, its proposed task order management system.

Sigma's management approach contained two significant weaknesses. The proposal did not adequately address responsibilities, functions, and levels of autonomy, and communications between the prime and subcontractor. The proposal also received a significant weakness related to its approach for identifying, mitigating and/or avoiding the three types of OCIs that could arise during contract performance and an unclear approach in the related communication processes between the Program Manager (PM), Business Manager (BM) and Corporate Legal Office. Sigma's management approach also contained weaknesses based on a lack of adequate strategies for hiring highly qualified professional and technical employees and on an assessment of the potential for each of the three types of OCIs to arise at time of contract award that lacked detail.

Subfactor 3, Safety and Health (S&H)

Sigma received an adjectival rating of Good for Subfactor 3. The proposal had no strengths or weaknesses for its proposed Safety and Health plan.

Science Systems and Applications, Inc. (SSAI)

SSAI received a Mission Suitability score of 882. SSAI's proposal contained significant strengths, strengths, and weaknesses summarized below.

Subfactor 1, Understanding the Requirement and Technical Approach (URTA)

SSAI received an adjectival rating of Very Good for Subfactor 1. SSAI received a significant strength based on its demonstrated technical understanding associated with data validation and an approach to exploit co-incident science measurements and quality and quantity of corroborative data. SSAI received another significant strength in SOW area 4.0 based on its comprehensive technical understanding of the ASDC and the management of risks inherent in related services and processes. SSAI also received a significant strength in SOW area 5.0 based on substantial technical understanding of instrument development and thorough understanding of instrument calibration and testing demonstrated by identification and management of risks associated with integration and communication, configuration and management control, and design and implementation of instrument testing.

SSAI's proposal contained strengths including: The technical approach for managing significant risks for field missions; supporting and maintaining instruments and supplies for COVE (Chesapeake Lighthouse); and, the approach and management of system administration risks in the ASDC. The proposal also contained strengths for the response to RTO #1 and #2. Strengths for RTO #1 included a sound approach by proposing effective optical design and instrument control program tools; the use of ground tests to sort out the instrument error budget, and instrument development risk assessment; and, the approach associated with field mission staffing for long deployments. SSAI received strengths for RTO #2 that included: The proposal of additional science measurement which provided a use of the instrument for enhanced science; a comprehensive technical response which proposed multiple uses of instrument data and rapid dissemination of data products; and, recognition of the need for early involvement in the project to coordinate all production and archival functions and continuing this effort throughout the project lifetime. SSAI also received a strength related to the suggested use of software and hardware instrument simulators in relation to both RTO #1 and #2.

SSAI's proposal also contained weaknesses. A weakness in the response to RTO #1 was due to a lack of assessment of risk in the Advanced Concept Lidar (ACL) development and deployment schedule. In relation to RTO #2, SSAI received weaknesses based on a lack of demonstrated understanding of the DIAL transmitter system engineering requirements; the types and number of personnel required; and, an unclear milestone schedule related to archival of final data analysis products. SSAI also received a weakness for inadequate subcontractor management information for both RTOs.

Subfactor 2, Management (MGMT)

SSAI received an adjectival rating of Very Good for Subfactor 2. SSAI's proposal contained significant strengths. SSAI received a significant strength for its management approach that included a comprehensive phase-in plan and addressed all phase-in activities in a realistic schedule ensuring the continuity of services and a thorough approach for the off-site facility requirements and support of off-site personnel. SSAI also received a significant strength based on its comprehensive OCI mitigation plan and process for identifying, mitigating and/or avoiding the three types of potential OCIs. The plan referenced all of NASA's related regulatory guidance, included examples of how each of the three types of OCIs could arise in relation to the STARSS II contract, and contained a comprehensive phase-in training program for COIs.

SSAI's proposal also contained many strengths including: An efficient management organizational structure to execute the work; a highly experienced and highly qualified key person responsible for contract performance; numerous award programs to ensure highly qualified professionals are attracted

and retained; effective approach and strategy for employees to express concerns; corporate funded leadership training; an effective strategy for utilization of Foreign Nationals; a total compensation plan with beneficial features; a substantial sharing of earned award fee with employees; an effective task order management system; and, achievement of CMMI Development level 2 and CMMI Level 3 in certain areas which exceed the contract requirements.

SSAI's proposal received a weakness related to uncertainty regarding the Program Manager's corporate role and a weakness because the proposal's assessment of the potential for each of the three types of OCIs to arise at time of contract award lacked detail.

Subfactor 3, Safety and Health (S&H)

SSAI received an adjectival rating of Excellent for Subfactor 3. The proposed Safety and Health plan received a significant strength for a comprehensive understanding of potential safety and health hazards as identified in the SOW and thoroughly covering the risks associated with accessing operations at the (COVE) Chesapeake Lighthouse Facility and hazards during field campaigns. The plan contained safety training plans and drills to support various practical scenarios during operations.

Factor 2, Cost/Price

The SEB and Cost/Price analyst performed an analysis of the proposed prices to assess price reasonableness and cost realism, to determine whether the Offerors demonstrated a clear understanding of the requirement and could perform the contract for the stated cost. The probable cost confidence is high for both ERC and SSAI and low for Sigma. ERC's proposal was adjusted down by 0.27% based on verification of indirect rates with the Defense Contract Audit Agency (DCAA) Alabama Branch Office. Although no adjustments were made the SEB had a concern regarding the size and skill mix of ERC's Program Management Office (PMO) costs. Sigma's proposal was adjusted upward by 12.54% based on verified indirect rates with the DCAA Southeastern Branch Office. Further, an adjustment was made by the Cost/Price analyst to remove phase-in costs that were in excess of those indicated in the contract offer. The probable cost confidence for Sigma is low based on a concern that Sigma was not compliant with the RFP instruction L.20 (3) (Subcontractor Proposal Information) and did not identify those other direct costs provided by a subcontractor on Cost Form A. The SEB confirmed in the technical and past performance volumes that Sigma anticipated some level of a subcontracted effort in the ASDC. There was also a concern related to Sigma's lack of support for proposed off-site facility costs. SSAI's proposal was adjusted downward by 1.18% based on the SEB's review of the technical proposal and duty description and hours allocated for the Program Manager (PM) and Business Manager (BM) and on an adjustment of indirect rates based on the DCAA Southeastern Branch Office report.

In accordance with FAR 15.402, the Contracting Officer has determined that the Offerors proposed prices are fair and reasonable based on the spread from the highest proposed price to the lowest proposed price, comparison of the proposed prices to the Government estimate, and the fact that adequate price competition was obtained. There was an 8.6% difference between the highest priced Offeror and the lowest priced Offeror. All Offerors proposed against 405,105 direct labor hours per contract year.

Factor 3, Past Performance

The SEB evaluated the Offeror's past performance records in accordance with M.3 of the RFP. The SEB considered the records of performing contracts similar in size, scope and complexity to the STARSS II requirement. Both the performance records and the relevance of the experience were evaluated. A confidence rating was assigned in accordance with NFS 1815.305.

Offeror	Pertinence Rating	Performance Rating	Level of Confidence
ERC	Pertinent	Excellent	Moderate
Sigma Space	Highly Pertinent	Very Good	High
SSAI	Very Highly Pertinent	Excellent	Very High

ERC presented five contracts of which one was rated pertinent and four somewhat pertinent. The Offeror's performance for these contracts was excellent; however, the contracts lacked relevancy to the STARSS II requirements. The Offeror demonstrated technical expertise and the ability to manage complex requirements; however, not in the areas of science required for the STARSS II contract. The lack of experience on similar science requirements contributed to the Moderate Level of Confidence rating for the Past Performance factor.

Sigma presented one highly pertinent contract and four contracts that were considered somewhat pertinent based on a lack of similar size, scope and complexity to the STARSS II contract. Sigma's performance of its highly pertinent contract was rated a very good across all questionnaire elements. Sigma's performance ratings on all contracts reflected a preponderance of very good ratings with a few excellent ratings. Based on the highly pertinent experience of one contract and the very good performance ratings, an overall rating of a High Level of Confidence was assigned for the Past Performance factor.

SSAI presented one very highly pertinent and two highly pertinent contracts. Two were similar in size and all three were similar in scope and complexity. The Offeror's performance record reflected excellent ratings on all contracts. The very highly pertinent experience and excellent performance resulted in an overall Very High Level of Confidence rating for the Past Performance factor.

Basis for Selection

The SEB presented its findings to me on November 5, 2010 and I am convinced that the SEB conducted a thorough, fair, and objective evaluation of all proposals in accordance with the established evaluation criteria in the RFP. I comparatively assessed the proposals against all evaluation factors and subfactors in the RFP. I also considered all factors, and their relative weights, in the selection of the Offeror that can perform the contract in a manner most advantageous to the Government.

In comparing the three Offerors in the area of Mission Suitability, Subfactor 1, Understanding the Requirements and Technical Approach, I noted that SSAI received both a significantly higher point score and a significantly higher adjectival rating than the other Offerors. The large discrepancy in scores and ratings was consistent with the significant strengths that SSAI received in relation to its understanding of the work across the SOW areas. In particular SSAI had significant strengths related to data validation and scientific measurements, ASDC operations and instrument development which encompassed the largest and most significant areas of work that are contained in SOW areas 3.0, 4.0 and 5.0. While SSAI's

significant strengths demonstrated exceptional technical understanding and approaches to these areas, neither of the other Offerors received significant strengths in these areas. To the contrary, ERC received significant weaknesses that reflected a lack of understanding in relation to SOW areas 3.0, 4.0 and 5.0. Similarly, Sigma received a significant weakness based on its identification and explanation of technical risks and mitigation approaches across the SOW areas. SSAI also received no significant weaknesses but demonstrated valuable technical understanding based on the strengths that it received. The only weaknesses that SSAI received were related to particular aspects of its proposed approach to the RTOs. I did not consider those weaknesses to significantly detract from the technical superiority that SSAI demonstrated in relation to its technical understanding of the work required across the most significant areas of this contract or from SSAI's overall technical approaches to the RTOs. Therefore, I considered SSAI to provide a significantly more valuable technical understanding and approach within the most significant Mission Suitability subfactor for this contract which requires a high level of specialized technical understanding.

Within Subfactor 2, Management Approach, SSAI and ERC both received an adjectival rating of Very Good and somewhat similar point scores, while Sigma received a rating of Fair with a much lower point score. SSAI received significant strengths based on its approaches to Phase-In and OCI mitigation and it received no significant weaknesses. I find SSAI's phase-in and OCI approaches to be of significant value. There are many large and highly technical tasks under this IDIQ contract that require transition. Phase-in difficulties would present significant disruption to accomplishment of Science Directorate work on the Center. OCI identification on task orders is essential to ensure unbiased work and unimpeded follow-on contracting. On the other hand, ERC received a significant strength based on its recruitment and retention approach. Although SSAI did not receive a similar significant strength, I noted that SSAI received several strengths related to recruitment and retention, one of which I considered to be especially important. That was that SSAI proposed to share a larger portion of its earned award fee with its employees. Additionally ERC received a significant weakness related to OCI and a weakness related to its Program Manager's lack of Atmospheric Science experience. I consider Atmospheric Science management experience to be highly important to the successful management of this contract that provides essential support to the Center's Atmospheric Science Programs. ERC also received a weakness related to its proposed Program Management Office that lacked the skill level and quantity of personnel to accommodate all the complex contract functions. ERC also received a weakness related to its Phase-In plan that represents a significant risk to an orderly transition. Sigma received no significant strengths but had significant weaknesses related to subcontracting and OCI. I find that SSAI provides more value than the ERC proposal and significantly more value than that provided by Sigma.

There was also a wide range of scores and ratings in the area of Safety and Health. I considered SSAI's superior score and rating in this area to reflect significant value relative to potentially hazardous operations involving the Chesapeake Light House and to risks inherent in scientific field campaigns.

Considering all three Mission Suitability subfactors, I find that SSAI provides a significantly more valuable proposal than both ERC and Sigma.

Regarding Factor 3, Past Performance, SSAI received a Very High Level of Confidence while Sigma received a High Level of Confidence and ERC received a Moderate Level of Confidence. Sigma's rating took into account a level of very good performance but performance that I did not consider to be on the same level as SSAI's. ERC's rating took into account less pertinent science experience than that demonstrated by SSAI. SSAI's past performance reflected value in terms of both excellent quality and very highly pertinent experience. Consistent with the past performance ratings, in terms of the size,

scope and complexity of SSAI's past performance and in relation to the STARSS II contract, I have a significantly higher level of confidence that SSAI, over the other Offerors, will successfully perform the effort.

Regarding Factor 2, Cost/Price, the STARSS II contract will be an Indefinite Delivery/Indefinite Quantity (ID/IQ) type contract in which cost-plus award fee task orders will be issued by the Government as requirements arise. SSAI's estimated costs were approximately 5% greater than the next technically highly rated Offeror's (ERC) probable cost. However, I noted that there was a concern regarding ERC's proposed management staffing level. This reflects a potential for increased costs as tasks are issued and the ID/IQ contract grows toward its maximum by requiring additional overhead and management support. I noted that SSAI and Sigma proposed appropriate management staff costs. I also noted that an element of SSAI's higher costs was its award fee but that SSAI planned to share a greater percentage of its earned award fee with its employees. I considered the potential for employees to receive that award fee as a valuable aspect of the SSAI proposal that would serve to enhance the effectiveness of the award fee as well as the employees. I also noted a lack of confidence in the probable cost for Sigma which was higher than that calculated for ERC or SSAI. I noted Sigma's probable cost had low confidence based on concerns with indirect rates and subcontractor costs which could greatly impact contract costs.

DECISION

In making the selection decision, I have considered the relative weight of the evaluation factors as indicated within the RFP and that all factors other than cost, when combined, are significantly more important than cost. As noted above, I find that SSAI provides a significantly more valuable proposal in relation to Mission Suitability. I also find that SSAI provides significantly greater value in the area of Past Performance. Regarding SSAI's probable costs, I have a high level of confidence that those costs are realistic for the estimated work and that they include realistic program management costs. I also find valuable SSAI's approach to share the highest percentage of award fee with its staff, thereby providing the greatest incentive for cost control and for employee effectiveness. To the extent that SSAI's probable costs represent higher costs, I find that the cost difference is offset by the vastly superior value associated with SSAI's Mission Suitability and Past Performance. Therefore, I find that the selection of SSAI is in the Government's best interest and provides the best value for the Government.

Accordingly, I select SSAI for award.



Stephen G. Jurczyk
Source Selection Authority