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Decision

Matter of: Allicent Technology, LLC

File: B-421944.2

Date: January 22, 2024

Ryan C. Bradel, Esq., Michael E. Hatch, Esq., and Brian S. Yu, Esq., Ward & Berry, PLLC, for the protester.

Daniel J. Strouse, Esq., and John J. O'Brien, Esq., Cordatis LLP, for Golden IT, LLC, the intervenor.

Justin M. Wakefield, Esq., Nickolas S. Card, Esq., and Richard L. Hatfield, Esq., Department of the Treasury, for the agency.

Christopher Alwood, Esq., and Alexander O. Levine, Esq., Office of the General Counsel, GAO, participated in the preparation of the decision.

DIGEST

Protest challenging the agency's evaluation of quotations and resulting best-value tradeoff is denied where the evaluation, and the tradeoff selection of a higher-rated, higher-priced quotation, were reasonable and consistent with the solicitation.

DECISION

Allicent Technology, LLC, a small business of McLean, Virginia, protests the establishment of a blanket purchase agreement (BPA) with Golden IT, LLC, a small business of Olathe, Kansas, under request for quotations (RFQ) No. 8296, issued by the Department of the Treasury, Internal Revenue Service (IRS), for information technology (IT) engineering services in support of the IRS's solution engineering program.¹ Allicent challenges the agency's evaluation of quotations and resulting best-value tradeoff.

¹ Allicent is a joint venture consisting of FreeAlliance, LLC and 22nd Century Technologies, Inc. Agency Report (AR), Tab D.1, Allicent Technical Quotation at iv. Golden IT is a mentor-protégé joint venture under the Small Business Administration's 8(a) mentor-protégé program, consisting of Sara Software Systems, which is the protégé and managing member, and Harmonia Holdings Group, which is the mentor. AR, Tab F.2, Source Selection Decision (SSD) at 11.

We deny the protest.

BACKGROUND

The agency issued the RFQ on March 16, 2023, using the procedures of Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) subpart 8.4, seeking to establish a single BPA with a 12-month base ordering period and four 12-month option ordering periods under the successful vendor's General Services Administration federal supply schedule (FSS) contract. AR, Tab E.1, RFQ at 3-4.² The solicitation sought quotations for the provision of professional engineering services in support of the IRS's solutions engineering program, which is responsible for the design and engineering functions of major IRS IT programs, platforms, and applications. COS at 2; RFQ at 5-7.

The solicitation provided that award would be made on a best-value tradeoff basis, considering price and the following three non-price factors listed in descending order of importance: (1) technical approach; (2) management approach; and, (3) past performance. RFQ at 9-10. For the purposes of the tradeoff, the non-price factors, when combined, were more important than price. *Id.* at 9. During the evaluation, the agency was to identify quotation attributes considered to be strengths, significant strengths, weaknesses, significant weaknesses, or deficiencies. *Id.* at 10. As relevant here, the solicitation defined a weakness as "an attribute of the [vendor's quotation] which is likely to increase the probability of unsuccessful contract performance." *Id.*

For the technical approach factor, vendors were to "describe their technical solution for completing the work described in [section three] of the Performance Work Statement (PWS)," including to specifically provide a "proposed solution for each functional area" identified by the PWS.³ RFQ at 10. The RFQ provided that vendors "shall demonstrate a clear understanding of the work to be performed and any knowledge or experience with any of the programs or systems discussed in the PWS." *Id.*

For the past performance factor, the RFQ provided that the agency would evaluate whether vendors' recent and relevant past performance demonstrated the "application

² The agency amended the solicitation once. Contracting Officer's Statement (COS) at 3; see *also* RFQ at 1. All citations to the RFQ in this decision are to the conformed copy provided by the agency at Tab E.1 of its report. The sections of the conformed solicitation were separately paginated, ultimately leading to multiple pages with repeated page numbers. For clarity, citations to the RFQ in this decision refer to the electronic page number of the Adobe PDF document provided by the agency.

³ The PWS identified six functional areas that were to be addressed by the vendors: (1) management and control; (2) data engineering platform services; (3) data modeling and interface development; (4) development modernization and enhancement; (5) transition to support; and (6) task order ramp up. RFQ at 25-39.

of knowledge and expertise in the areas listed in the PWS.”⁴ RFQ at 13. The solicitation stated that the agency could base its evaluation of past performance upon completed past performance questionnaires (PPQs), past performance information found in contractor performance assessment reports (CPARs), or “upon any other resource available.” *Id.* The RFQ specified that the agency could “consider information . . . from any one or multiple sources and is not restricted to information” from any particular source. *Id.* at 13-14. The RFQ explained that the agency would rate each quotation as either excellent, good, acceptable, marginal, unacceptable, or neutral under the past performance factor.⁵ *Id.* at 14.

The agency received quotations from eight vendors, including Allicent and Golden IT. AR, Tab F.2, Award Decision at 1-2. After evaluating the quotations, the agency established the BPA with Golden IT. COS at 3. On September 5, 2023, Allicent filed a protest with our Office, challenging the agency’s evaluation of quotations and resulting source selection decision. *Allicent Tech., LLC*, B-421944, Sept. 18, 2023 (unpublished decision). On September 12, the agency notified our Office that it intended to take corrective action by reevaluating quotations and making a new source selection decision. *Id.* Based on the agency’s intended corrective action, we dismissed the protest as academic. *Id.*

During the pendency of the corrective action, the agency reevaluated Allicent’s and Golden IT’s quotations as follows:

	Allicent	Global IT
Technical Approach	Good	Excellent
Management Approach	Good	Good
Past Performance	Good	Excellent
Price	\$37,737,794	\$37,739,066

AR, Tab F.2, SSD at 3.

⁴ The RFQ provided that past performance was recent if it was “within three (3) years of the submission deadline in this RFQ” and relevant past performance comprised “projects similar in size, scope and complexity to the requirements listed within [the] PWS.” RFQ at 13.

⁵ As relevant here, the RFQ defined a good rating under the past performance factor as:

Relevant past performance record involving contracts similar in size, scope, and complexity to the solicitation requirements. Performance met contractual requirements and exceeded some to the Government’s benefit. The contractual performance may have been accomplished with some minor problems for which corrective actions taken by the contractor were effective.

RFQ at 14.

The source selection authority (SSA) compared the relative benefits of Allicent and Golden IT's quotations and concluded that "it is in the Government's best interest to pay a .01 [percent] premium on Golden IT's" quotation due to its superiority under the technical approach and past performance factors. *Id.* at 14.

The agency notified Allicent of its award decision. AR, Tab G.1, Notice of Award. Allicent subsequently filed this protest with our Office.

DISCUSSION

Allicent raises numerous challenges to the agency's evaluation of quotations and the resulting source selection decision. In this regard, the protester argues that the agency unreasonably assessed weaknesses in Allicent's quotation under the technical approach factor, that the agency's assignment of adjectival ratings under the non-price factors was unreasonable, and that the resulting best-value tradeoff was unreasonable and undocumented. Although we do not specifically address all of Allicent's challenges, we have considered each of them fully and find that none affords a basis on which to sustain the protest.⁶

Technical Approach

The protester challenges the assessment of several weaknesses in its quotation under the technical approach factor. Protest at 11-15; Comments at 3-11. As discussed below in a few representative examples, we find that the agency's assessment of weaknesses under the technical approach factor was reasonable and consistent with the RFQ's evaluation criteria.

⁶ The protester also challenged various aspects of the agency's evaluation of Golden IT's non-price quotation, generally arguing that the agency unreasonably evaluated Golden IT's quotation under the technical approach and management approach factors. Protest at 16-18. Based only on "Allicent's knowledge of the industry" and "of Golden IT's inexperience with [the IRS] and its needs" the protester contends that the agency "unreasonably over-rated Golden IT[s]" quotation. *Id.* at 16-17. Before the submission of the agency report, the IRS requested that we dismiss the allegation as speculative and lacking a factual basis of protest. Req. for Partial Dismissal at 2-3. 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). These requirements contemplate that protesters will provide, at a minimum, either allegations or evidence sufficient, if uncontradicted, to establish the likelihood that the protester will prevail in its claim of improper agency action. *CSR Enters., Inc.*, B-419853, B-419853.8, Aug. 19, 2021, 2021 CPD ¶ 285 at 5. Here, Allicent did not provide any evidence or support to substantiate the claim that the agency had unreasonably evaluated Golden IT's quotation, and we dismissed this protest ground as speculative. Electronic Protest Docketing System No. 20; 4 C.F.R. § 21.5(f); see *International Ctr. for Language Studies, Inc.-Recon.*, B-418916.2, Sept. 9, 2020, 2020 CPD ¶ 294 at 4.

When, as here, an agency issues a solicitation to FSS contract holders under FAR subpart 8.4 and conducts a competition, we will review the record to ensure that the agency's evaluation was reasonable and consistent with the terms of the solicitation. *EA Eng'g, Sci., and Tech., Inc.*, B-417361, B-417361.2, June 13, 2019, 2019 CPD ¶ 218 at 3. It is a vendor's responsibility to submit a well-written quotation, with adequately detailed information which clearly demonstrates compliance with the solicitation requirements; a vendor runs the risk that the agency will unfavorably evaluate its quotation where it fails to do so. *See The Concourse Group, LLC*, B-411962.5, Jan. 6, 2017, 2017 CPD ¶ 36 at 7. A protester's disagreement with the agency's judgment does not establish that an evaluation was unreasonable. *Id.* at 4.

Allient contends that the agency unreasonably assessed its quotation a weakness for failing to address desktop client packages for the Documentum and Informatica programs utilized by the enterprise document management and the enterprise Informatica platforms.⁷ Protest at 12-13; Comments at 4-5. The protester argues that the weakness was unreasonable because most of the users accessing Documentum and Informatica do so through "browser-based components" and "[o]nly developer desktops require these software packages." Protest at 12.

The agency responds that the weakness was reasonable because Allient failed to address Documentum or Informatica client desktop packages and the RFQ required vendors to address desktop packages for the enterprise document management and the enterprise Informatica platforms. COS at 6-7 (*citing* PWS § 3.2); Memorandum of Law (MOL) at 4-5. The agency notes that approximately 275 developers utilize a desktop platform for the enterprise Informatica platform. COS at 7.

As noted above, the RFQ required vendors to describe their technical solution for completing the work described in section three of the PWS, including a "proposed solution for each functional area." RFQ at 10. The RFQ specified that vendors "shall demonstrate a clear understanding of the work to be performed . . . in the PWS." *Id.* Section 3.2 of the PWS described functional area two, which required the successful vendor to provide engineering services to four enumerated technology shared services platforms, including the enterprise document management platform and the enterprise Informatica platform.⁸ RFQ at 31-33. The PWS specified that, for each of the four

⁷ The enterprise document management platform is a "critical [technology shared services] platform" that supports more than 2000 users and is built with the "OpenText Documentum suite of products on Windows and Linux virtual machines." RFQ at 31. The enterprise Informatica platform is a similarly critical platform that is built with the "Informatica suite of products on [the] Linux Operating System" and "is expected to handle and process huge amounts of data in support of several" IRS modernization projects. *Id.* at 31-32.

⁸ The other platforms identified by section 3.2 of the PWS were the Business Object enterprise platform and the Tableau visualization environment platform. RFQ at 21, 31.

identified platforms, the vendor was to “develop, deploy and field test Desktop packages.” *Id.* at 32-33.

The record demonstrates that the agency assessed Allicent’s quotation a weakness for failing to “address desktop client packages for Documentum and Informatica.” AR, Tab F.1, Technical Evaluation at 8. The agency specifically noted that Allicent’s quotation “didn’t address developing packages for developer’s desktops.” *Id.* Our review of Allicent’s quotation does not reveal, and Allicent does not point to, any discussion of desktop client packages for Documentum or Informatica in its quotation. See AR, Tab D.1, Allicent Technical Quotation at 12-20. Further, Allicent’s protest essentially concedes that its quotation referenced “desktop components only on the [DELETED] platforms.” Protest at 12.

On this record, we find the agency reasonably concluded that Allicent’s quotation failed to explain how it would develop, deploy, and field-test desktop packages for Documentum and Informatica, and that this failure is likely to increase the probability of unsuccessful performance. Allicent was required to provide sufficient detail so that the agency could properly evaluate this aspect of Allicent’s quotation. *DCR Servs. & Constr., Inc.*, B-420179.2, B-420179.3, Apr. 28, 2022, 2022 CPD ¶ 109 at 5. Accordingly, we deny this ground of protest.⁹

As another representative example, Allicent contends that its quotation was unreasonably assessed a weakness for failing to address certain deliverables under the data modeling and interface development functional area. Protest at 14; Comments at 7. Specifically, the weakness states that Allicent’s quotation did not “address Data Dictionary and Conceptual Model deliverables; data models for Transactional or Analytical needs, Realtime or Batch Operations,” as required by PWS section 3.3. AR, Tab F.1, Technical Evaluation at 10. The protester argues that its quotation’s “discussion of logical and physical data models necessarily encompass[es] conceptual data models and their associated deliverables” and that vendors did not need to “mention each deliverable in order to demonstrate an understanding of the work to be performed.” Protest at 14.

The agency responds that the weakness was reasonable because Allicent’s quotation failed to “demonstrate how it planned to achieve” the deliverables identified in the PWS.

⁹ The protester separately contends that “the RFQ did not call for [vendors] to address desktop client packages for” the enterprise document management and the enterprise Informatica platforms. Comments at 4. However, as discussed above, the RFQ required vendors to describe their technical solution for completing the work described in the PWS. RFQ at 10. Further, the PWS specified that for four platforms, including the enterprise document management and the enterprise Informatica platforms, the vendor was to “develop, deploy and field test Desktop packages.” *Id.* at 32-33. Accordingly, we find Allicent’s interpretation of the solicitation to be unreasonable and contrary to the unambiguous terms of the solicitation. See *MetroStar Sys., Inc.*, B-419890, B-419890.2, Sept. 13, 2021, 2021 CPD ¶ 324 at 11-12.

MOL at 7-8. The agency contends that the quotation section identified by the protester does not address Alligent's "understanding of the work to be performed" for the deliverables identified by the weakness.

Section 3.3 of the PWS described the data modeling and interface development functional area requirements for the successful vendor to "[d]evelop and maintain data models and data mapping documents for IRS projects and systems." *Id.* at 34. The PWS then identified deliverables for the functional area, including conceptual, logical and physical data models to handle transactional or analytical needs, realtime or batch operations, and data dictionary.¹⁰ *Id.* As noted above, the RFQ required vendors to describe their technical solution for completing the work described in "each functional area" of the PWS and specified that vendors "shall demonstrate a clear understanding of the work to be performed." *Id.* at 10.

Here, we see no basis to object to the agency's assessment of a weakness for Alligent's failure to address how it planned to provide the deliverables required by section 3.3 of the PWS. In this regard, the agency assessed a weakness in Alligent's quotation for failing to address the required data dictionary and conceptual data models deliverables, including data models for transactional or analytical needs, and realtime or batch processing. AR, Tab F.1, Technical Evaluation at 10. In discussing the data modeling and interface development functional area, Alligent's technical quotation does not specifically address its approach to any of the deliverables identified in the weakness.¹¹ See AR, Tab D.1, Alligent Technical Quotation at 20-22. The protester argues that its discussion of logical and physical data models "necessarily encompass[es] conceptual data models," however, it does not clearly contend that its quotation addressed the data dictionary deliverable or otherwise point to any language in its quotation that meaningfully explains how it intended to complete the deliverables identified by the weakness.¹² See Comments at 7.

¹⁰ Section 3.3 of the PWS identified the following deliverables:

Conceptual, Logical and Physical data models to handle Transactional or Analytical needs, Realtime or Batch Operations. [Extensible Markup Language] Schemas and/or JSON format structures. Deliver data flow diagrams. Data Catalog, Data Dictionary, Metadata, Data Mappings, and Interface Control Document (ICD).

RFQ at 34.

¹¹ Alligent alternatively contends that the RFQ does not list the items identified by the PWS as deliverables, but rather as "desired outcomes." Comments at 7. However, while section 3.3 lists the relevant deliverables in a paragraph that is labeled "desired outcomes," section 5 of the PWS explicitly lists the required deliverables, which, as relevant here, includes conceptual data models and the data dictionary. RFQ at 45.

¹² To the extent Alligent argues that its statement discussing its experience with various data modeling and interface development tools meets the RFQ's requirements at issue (continued...)

The protester maintains that “the facial omission” of discussion of the deliverables in Alligent’s quotation “is not an attribute likely to increase the probability of unsuccessful performance.” Protest at 14. However, disagreement with the agency regarding the adequacy of the level of detail in its quotation, without more, does not provide a basis to sustain the protest. *The Concourse Group, LLC, supra* at 7.

Past Performance

Alligent challenges the evaluation of its quotation under the past performance factor. Protest at 18-20; Comments at 12-14. Alligent primarily argues that its past performance merited an overall rating of excellent based on generally positive PPQ and CPAR ratings and comments. *Id.* Alligent contends that instead the agency unreasonably weighed identified problems from Alligent’s past performance references to lower Alligent’s rating to good. See Comments at 13.

The agency responds that its evaluation of Alligent’s past performance was reasonable and consistent with the solicitation’s evaluation criteria. MOL at 10-12. The agency contends that Alligent’s past performance record demonstrated certain recurring issues of concern, resulting in the agency reasonably rating Alligent’s overall past performance as good rather than excellent. *Id.* at 11. For the reasons discussed below, we agree with the agency.

An agency’s evaluation of past performance, which includes its consideration of the relevance, scope, and size of a vendor’s performance history, is a matter of discretion, which we will not disturb unless the agency’s assessment is unreasonable or inconsistent with the solicitation criteria. See *NextGen Federal Sys., LLC, B-420456 et al.*, Apr. 14, 2022, 2022 CPD ¶ 99 at 13. In making an overall past performance assessment, an agency is not compelled to adopt wholesale the adjectival ratings assigned to a vendor in its past performance reports. See *Brown Point Facility Mgmt. Sols., LLC, B-420299, Jan. 24, 2022, 2022 CPD ¶ 47* at 5-6.

Here, the agency reviewed Alligent’s quotation, the PPQs received from Alligent’s contract references, and the CPARs for two of Alligent’s past performance projects. AR, Tab F.1, Technical Evaluation at 17-19; AR, Tab F.2, SSD at 12-13. The agency concluded that all three past performance references submitted by Alligent were recent and relevant as defined by the RFQ. AR, Tab F.2, SSD at 12. Within the CPARs and PPQs, the assessing officials assessed contractor performance under several

here, we do not agree. As the agency notes, the language identified by the protester simply restates a different set of the PWS’s functional area 3 requirements without discussion of its plan to provide the required deliverables. See Comments at 7; MOL at 7; *compare* RFQ at 34, *with* AR, Tab D.1, Alligent Technical Quotation at 21. Alligent should have known that such language might not be sufficiently descriptive because the RFQ warned vendors that they should not “merely reiterate the objectives or reformulate the requirements specified in the PWS or solicitation.” RFQ at 7.

categories through both adjectival ratings and comments. AR, Tab F.3, IRS IT CPAR; AR, Tab F.4, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Terrorist Screening Center (TSC) CPAR; AR, Tab F.5, FBI TSC PPQ; AR, Tab F.6, Marine Corps Facilities Service Branch (FSB) PPQ. It is apparent from our review of the record that, based on the commentary in the CPARs and PPQs, the agency reasonably concluded that the documented issues in Allicent's past performance justified a rating of good rather than excellent.

For example, the record confirms the agency's finding that multiple problems were apparent on the face of Allicent's IRS IT CPAR. While the adjectival ratings in the CPAR are mostly satisfactory with one category rated very good, the comments reveal several performance issues. AR, Tab F.3 IRS IT CPAR at 3. Under the cost control category, the IRS IT CPAR noted that the vendor had failed to properly control operations and maintenance funds "and ran out of funding unexpectedly without notification to the government" which caused a pause in operations and maintenance work for more than a month. *Id.* In addition, the CPAR states that the vendor failed to provide certain cost reports on time and "made several billing mistakes." *Id.* Also, the CPAR explained under the management category that all but one key person left the contract and the contractor failed to replace them "within 10 days as required by the terms of the [c]ontract."¹³ *Id.* at 4.

Separately, the Marine Corps FSB PPQ revealed similar concerns. Specifically, the PPQ noted as a weakness that "[t]he accounting department has been mentioned every CPARS review" and specifically recommended a "review of accounting practices and processes" for the vendor. AR, Tab F.6, Marine Corps FSB PPQ at 4. The PPQ also described problems with losses of personnel, specifically noting that "[t]here were losses of key personnel" both "towards contract end and throughout the contract period." *Id.* at 5. The PPQ specified that the personnel losses "were impacting to FSB."¹⁴ *Id.*

¹³ Notably, under the comments for quality--which was the one category rated as very good in the CPAR--the assessing official noted that for a certain work request "the contractor did not deliver complete [operations and maintenance] automations nor even provide a solid plan of action to do" so. *Id.* The assessing official also noted that for a separate work request, "the vendor was unable to obtain agreed upon requirements with the customer leading to continuous scope changes and a difficult relationship with the customer." *Id.*

¹⁴ The PPQ also identified an issue with the vendor's subcontractor management, explaining:

The employees for the small business under 22nd Century Technologies Inc., left during the contract extension period. During the re compete period, no new subcontracting hires were onboarded. Therefore, no small business rating is accounted for.

AR, Tab F.6, Marine Corps FSB PPQ at 5.

The contemporaneous evaluation record demonstrates that the agency documented its concerns with Alligent's past performance. In the technical evaluation report, while acknowledging Alligent's generally positive past performance, the agency identified the accounting issues raised during two different past performance projects as well as several of the issues addressed in the above-discussed CPAR and PPQ. AR, Tab F.1, Technical Evaluation at 17-19. The SSA also found that Alligent's past performance record included repeated issues with personnel retention and accounting practices. AR, Tab F.2, SSD at 12-13.

In sum, the agency's evaluation record reflects its documented concerns with the numerous problems identified in Alligent's past performance on two recent and relevant contracts. Contrary to the protester's assertions, the agency was not bound by any particular positive comment, adjectival ratings, or overall statements of confidence contained in the CPARs and PPQs. Rather, the agency could, as it did here, identify negative performance trends or repeated areas of concern revealed in the reports' narrative assessments. *Id.*; AR, Tab F.1, Technical Evaluation at 17-19; see *Brown Point Facility Mgmt. Sols., LLC, supra*. The past performance reports and evaluation record sufficiently demonstrate that the IRS reasonably looked beyond the adjectival ratings to identify concerns about Alligent's performance, which formed the basis of the agency's overall past performance assessment.

Further, we find nothing objectionable with the agency's assignment of a rating of good to Alligent's past performance. The RFQ's definitions of a good past performance rating and an excellent past performance rating are similar. As noted above, the RFQ defines a good past performance rating as follows:

Relevant past performance record involving contracts similar in size, scope, and complexity to the solicitation requirements. Performance met contractual requirements and exceeded some to the Government's benefit. The contractual performance may have been accomplished with some minor problems for which corrective actions taken by the contractor were effective.

RFQ at 14.

The RFQ defines excellent past performance similarly, except a vendor with excellent past performance would exceed "many" instead of "some" requirements, would have "few" instead of "some" minor problems, and its corrective actions would be "highly effective" instead of just "effective." *Id.* On this record, we see no basis to object to the agency's conclusion that the problems identified in Alligent's past performance constituted "some problems" instead of "few problems." We therefore find the agency's

assessment of a good rating to Allicent's past performance to be reasonable and consistent with the terms of the solicitation.¹⁵

¹⁵ We are similarly unpersuaded by Allicent's arguments that the agency should have assigned its quotation excellent ratings under the technical approach and management approach factors. See Protest at 15-16; Comments at 9-12. For example, the protester avers that the several strengths assessed under the management approach factor should have resulted in an excellent rating because they "clearly outweigh" the zero weaknesses assessed under the same factor. Protest at 16.

The evaluation of quotations and assignment of adjectival ratings should generally not be based upon a simple count of strengths and weaknesses, but on a qualitative assessment of the quotations consistent with the evaluation scheme. *Amyx, Inc.*, B-410623, B-410623.2, Jan. 16, 2015, 2015 CPD ¶ 45 at 11. In this regard, it is well-established that ratings, be they numerical, adjectival, or color, are merely guides for intelligent decision making in the procurement process. *Id.* Moreover, there is no legal requirement that an agency must award the highest possible rating under an evaluation factor simply because the quotation contains strengths, or is not evaluated as having any weaknesses, or both. See *Innovative Mgmt. & Tech. Approaches, Inc.*, B-413084, B-413084.2, Aug. 10, 2016, 2016 CPD ¶ 217 at 5.

We find no basis to object to the agency's assignment of a rating of good to Allicent's quotation under the management approach factor. The agency reviewed Allicent's quotation, identified six strengths and one significant strength, and rated the quotation good under the RFQ's evaluation criteria. AR, Tab F.1, Technical Evaluation at 14-16. The SSA reviewed the underlying evaluation, including the assessed strengths, and concluded that "Allicent provided a management approach that outlined an effective, efficient, and achievable approach for meeting the requirements with strengths that outweighed any weaknesses." AR, Tab F.2, SSD at 10-11; see also RFQ at 10 (defining the good adjectival rating under the management approach factor).

Accordingly, we find that the record confirms that the agency assigned ratings based on the qualitative nature of the strengths assessed and not a simple tally of the number of strengths. Especially in light of our conclusion below--that the SSA looked beyond the ratings and considered the quotations' relative advantages in making their award decision--we see no basis to object to the agency's assignment of a good rating to Allicent's quotation under the management approach factor. See *Amyx, Inc.*, *supra*.

Best-Value Tradeoff

As relevant here, the record reflects that the SSA conducted a comparative analysis of quotations and concluded that “it is in the Government’s best interest to pay a .01 [percent] premium” to Golden IT’s technically superior quotation. AR, Tab F.2, SSD at 14. Allicent contends that the SSA’s tradeoff decision was unreasonable for multiple reasons. As discussed below, we find that none provide a basis for our Office to sustain the protest.

Allitent first argues that errors in the underlying evaluation resulted in a flawed best-value tradeoff resulting in the selection of Golden IT because “the ratings imposed on Allicent’s [quotation] were irrational.” Protest at 20; Comments at 14. 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, we dismiss this allegation because derivative allegations do not establish an independent bases of protest. *GCC Techs., LLC*, B-416459.2, Nov. 19, 2018, 2018 CPD ¶ 394 at 8.

Allitent next challenges the sufficiency of the agency’s best-value decision. Comments at 14. In this regard, the protester avers that the tradeoff analysis merely “recites bullet points excerpted from” the technical evaluation “and does not demonstrate any serious analysis of the trade-offs between” the vendors. *Id.*

Where, as here, a procurement conducted pursuant to FAR subpart 8.4 provides for the establishment of a BPA on a best-value tradeoff basis, it is the function of the SSA to perform a price/technical tradeoff, that is, to determine whether one quotation’s technical superiority is worth its higher prices. *22nd Century Techs., Inc.*, B-418029 *et al.*, Dec. 26, 2019, 2020 CPD ¶ 14 at 16. An agency properly may select a more highly rated quotation over one offering a lower price when it reasonably has determined that the technical superiority outweighs the price difference. *Id.*; *SRA Int’l, Inc.*; *NTT DATA Servs. Fed. Gov’t, Inc.*, B-413220.4 *et al.*, May 19, 2017, 2017 CPD ¶ 173 at 13. The extent of such tradeoffs is governed by a test of rationality and consistency with the evaluation criteria. *Sigmatech, Inc.*, B-415028.3, B-415028.4, Sept. 11, 2018, 2018 CPD ¶ 336 at 11. A protester’s disagreement with the agency’s judgment, without more, does not establish that the best-value tradeoff was unreasonable. *Id.*

Here, the record establishes that, in making the best-value tradeoff determination, the SSA performed a comprehensive review and comparison of the competing quotations’ potential benefits, as well as their respective costs. AR, Tab F.2, SSD at 9-14. When comparing Allicent and Golden IT’s quotations, the SSA specifically identified multiple positive aspects of Golden IT’s technical approach and past performance that were not similarly identified in Allicent’s quotation. *Id.* For example, the SSA notes that Golden IT “demonstrated the creation of desktop packages . . . for all four [] platforms” required by the PWS, while, as discussed above, the agency assessed a weakness in the protester’s quotation because it “did not address client packages for Documentum and informatica.” *Id.* at 10; *see also* AR, Tab F.1, Technical Evaluation at 8.

Based on the comparison of the quotations' benefits, the SSA concluded that "Golden IT is superior to Allicent" under the technical approach and past performance factors, and that the vendors were equal under the management approach factor. AR, Tab F.2, SSD at 14. The SSA noted that technical approach was the most important factor and price was the least important factor. *Id.* The SSA then determined that Golden IT represented the best value to the government because its identified advantages under the technical approach and past performance factors outweighed its quotation's .01 percent price premium compared to Allicent's quotation. *Id.* Based on the record here, we find the source selection decision to be adequately documented and we find no basis to question the reasonableness of the SSA's best-value tradeoff determination.

The protest is denied.

Edda Emmanuelli Perez
General Counsel