Comptroller General
of the United States

Washington, D.C. 20548

Decision

Matter of: Sverdrup Civil, Inc.

File: B-278627

Date: January 23, 1998

David G. Loseman, Esq., Armstrong, Teasdale, Schlafly & Davis, for the protester.
Alan P. Shapiro, Esq., Department of the Army, for the agency.
Robert Arsenoff, Esq., and Paul I. Lieberman, Esq., Office of the General Counsel, GAO, participated in the preparation of the decision.

DIGEST

Protest that agency should have rejected awardee's bid because it included a dash as a price entry for one line item, under a solicitation which required bids for all items, is denied; the entry constitutes an unequivocal obligation on the part of the bidder to perform the work described in the associated line item at no cost to the government.

DECISION

Sverdrup Civil, Inc. protests the award of a contract to Southwest Engineering, Inc., under invitation for bids (IFB) No. DACW09-95-B-0030, issued by the Corps of Engineers, Department of the Army, for Phase II of the Hansen Dam Recreation Lake project. Sverdrup contends that Southwest's bid should have been rejected as nonresponsive for failure to enter a price for a required line item.

We deny the protest.

The IFB contained 28 line items with spaces next to each for prices. Section 00010 of the IFB provided, in relevant part, that:

> Bids shall be submitted on all line items of the Pricing Schedule, including Option Items, otherwise the bid will be considered nonresponsive and rejected.
>
> Amounts and prices shall be indicated in either words or figures, not both.

The IFB also contained the clause set forth at Federal Acquisition Regulation § 52.214-18(c) which provides: "If the solicitation requires bidding on all items, failure to do so will disqualify the bid."

Four bids were received, three of which were found responsive, of which Southwest's total bid of $9,755,000 was low and Sverdrup's bid of $10,726,434 was next low. Southwest placed numerical amounts next to the spaces provided for prices for 27 of the 28 line items; in the space provided for line item 0005, "PHASE 1A STILLING BASIN," Southwest placed a handwritten dash.

Sverdrup maintains that placing a dash next to line item 0005 rendered Southwest's bid nonresponsive because of the above-quoted solicitation pricing requirements. In response, the agency points to our decision, Yonker, Inc., B-189869, Dec. 22, 1977, 77-2 CPD ¶ 495, in which we held that a bidder's entry of a dash next to a line item did not render its bid nonresponsive under a substantially similar IFB clause as that set forth in this solicitation. Specifically, the IFB in Yonker provided:

> Bidder must bid on no less than a complete schedule and must quote on all items of the schedule(s) for which a bid is submitted. Failure to do so will disqualify the bid.

In finding that the disputed bid in Yonker was responsive, we noted that the restriction contained in the IFB did not require that a specific figure be placed next to each item nor did it preclude the use of an acceptable symbol, such as a dash, which unambiguously connotes no cost or charge. Id. at 2.

Sverdrup argues that the Yonker decision is distinguishable from the facts of this case because the first line of section 00010 does require a specific price for each item and the second sentence indicates that only words or figures may be used--circumstances not present in Yonker.

This distinction is without substance. Here, the second sentence of section 00010 provides for the use of "figures," which we do not view as limited to numerical entries; rather it encompasses the entry of a dash, which our decisions recognize as synonymous with an entry of "zero dollars," or "no cost." Keahey's Moving Co., B-224273, Nov. 24, 1986, 86-2 CPD ¶ 602 at 3. The second sentence of section 00010 appears to be intended simply to eliminate the possibility of inconsistencies between number entries expressed in both words and numerals.

Since Southwest's bid indicates that it is obligated to perform the work required by line item 0005 at no cost to the government, and there is no evidence to the contrary, the bid was properly found responsive. Id.

The protest is denied.

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