

From: The Lab @ DOC
Subject: MMCB Vol. 2 - Totality & Counting of Strengths, May 2019



Welcome to MMCB Volume 2! In this issue we dive into an acquisition that has plagued DHS (ICE) for the last two years. I recommend reading the decision (it may look familiar), then strapping yourselves in for some good Monday morning reflection.

Matter of: 360 IT Integrated Solutions
File: [B-414650.33,B-414650.34](#)
Link: <https://www.gao.gov/products/b-414650.33%2Cb-414650.34>
Date: May 24, 2019

Summary from the Decision: *“360 IT Integrated Solutions (360 ITIS), a small business located in Reston, Virginia, protests the issuance of a task order to Inerso Corporation, a small business located in Vienna, Virginia, under request for quotations (RFQ) No. HSCETC-17-Q-00010, issued by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for information technology operations support services (ITOSS). The protester argues that the agency unreasonably evaluated quotations and conducted a flawed best-value tradeoff determination.*

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

Overview: First, just look at the number B-414650.34; that is the highest I have seen which showcases how long and messy this has been with protests and supplemental protests. The Background section of the decision starts with *“The instant protest arises following a lengthy procurement and protest history.”* ITOSS was released in March 2017, and it has had five separate protests from different protestors (only 11 quotes), multiple sustainments, rounds of corrective actions, and finally now a denial/dismissal. This looks familiar because it is related to the case in the first version of the PIL Boot Camp Workbook, pg. 37, titled the “Danger of Counting Strengths and Weaknesses”. This topic is covered in much more detail below!

Highlights

The prior decision referenced above and in the PIL Bootcamp Workbook included the statement *“The greater number of substantial strengths in the awardee’s quotation was the basis for the agency’s decision to issue the task order to Inerso,”* which partially led to the sustainment. You can compare this summary box from this decision, included below, with that from the prior decision and see how different they are.

	Inerso	360 ITIS
Management Approach	Excellent Strengths=24, Weaknesses=0	Excellent Strengths=14, Weaknesses=0
Technical Approach	Excellent Strengths=12, Weaknesses=0	Good Strengths=6, Weaknesses=1
Past Performance	Substantial Confidence	Substantial Confidence
Total Price	\$131,934,626	\$113,053,511

This decision talks a little bit differently than its predecessor. Here it states that “the SSA found that “Inerso’s technical approach had more strengths that substantially benefited contract performance than 360 ITIS’s...“Ultimately, the SSA concluded that the benefits associated with the “totality of 360 ITIS’s strengths” did not outweigh the benefits represented by the totality of Inerso’s strengths, and that this difference in benefits was worth the 17 percent price premium between the two vendors’ quotations.”

It objectively appears that this ICE team learned throughout the series of protests and tweaked their approach and documentation, likely as part of the corrective actions on the multiple sustained decisions. Bolstering the decision with the ‘totality of strengths’ statement represents a complete shift in thinking, at least to the prior decisions associated with ITOSS. I would still recommend this team try confidence ratings next time in lieu of the traditional adjectival rating approach.

*For a full background on the prior sustained decisions, see this footnote: “On May 21, our Office sustained Ace Info’s protest, concluding that the agency’s evaluation of Inerso’s past performance contained material errors and was inadequately documented. See Ace Info Solutions, Inc., B-414650.10, B-414650.14, May 21, 2018, 2018 CPD ¶ 189. On May 30, our Office sustained VariQ’s protest, concluding that the agency’s evaluation contained material errors and was inadequately documented. See VariQ Corp., B-414650.11, B-414650.15, May 30, 2018, 2018 CPD ¶ 199.”

This volume was originally authored in May 2019 and refreshed in March 2025.

*Disclaimer: The information contained in this MMCB is merely an opinion of the author and does not constitute formal legal or policy guidance of any kind.

