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Successful Air Force Source Selections Start with an Effective Empowered Team

by

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Preface

I have been working in the Air Force acquisition for almost 30 years and have been a Contracting Officer for 20 years and have been a member of 19 source selection teams in either an advisory role, contract specialist or contracting officer role. Although source selections follow very specific procedures and processes, it is the source selection team, people, that implement these procedures and follow these processes. I have seen teams succeed and teams struggle following the same procedures. This led me to this research to determine if a focus on team formation and team empowerment and not just processes and procedures can contribute to the efficiency of source selections in the Air Force.

I would like to thank my instructor and advisor, Dr. Greg Intoccia; who provided excellent guidance and feedback throughout my research. I would also like to thank the people who I interviewed for this research. Specifically, I would like to thank Ms. Victoria Fry, Mr. John Brannan, and Col Daniel Marticello for their insights and perspectives on leadership and source selections. Their insights and experiences they shared was essential to my research.

Abstract

DOD and Air Force acquisition experts have developed many tools, templates, policies, and procedures for selection of a source or sources in competitive negotiated acquisitions. However, negotiation is more art than science and while the DOD Source Selection Procedures define the roles and responsibilities of the team that will conduct a source selection, there is less guidance and focus how to create an effective source selection team and empower that team to successfully complete a source selection.

This purpose of this research was to determine if an increased focus on the formation and empowerment of source selection teams and not just processes and procedures contribute to the efficiency and success of Air Force source selections. Through a case study of team dynamics on three source selections, five common principles emerged that demonstrated an increased focus on the formation and empowerment of source selection teams contributes to the efficiency and success of source selections. Further this researched reveled that management has a critical role in forming and empowering source selection teams founded in the principle that management should consider individual's capabilities of potential team members and not merely thinking of the team as a collection of functional capabilities. Finally, management should empower the source selection team to accomplish their job. This increased focus on the source selection team will greatly contribute to the efficiency and success of Air Force source selections.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

The objective of a source selection is for the Air Force to select a contractor that will deliver quality and timely products and services to the Warfighter and the Nation at the best value to the taxpayer. ¹

The Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) 6.101 states, “10 U.S.C. 2304 and 41 U.S.C. 3301 require, with certain limited exceptions, that contracting officers shall promote and provide for full and open competition in soliciting offers and awarding Government contracts.”² As prescribed in FAR Part 15, in systems acquisitions in the Air Force, that requirement is met by selection of a source in competitive negotiated acquisitions – conducting a source selection. Simply put, a source selection is a process the Air Force uses to select the contractor to provide the supplies or services it needs to operate. Source Selections are conducted by a group of people from various fields. This group of Air Force employees makes up a source selection team. This team is responsible for conducting a source selection to competitively award a contract to the company that provides the best value to the Air Force for the supplies and services needed.

Source selections are people driven – team driven. Acquiring supplies and services through a source selection is a very labor intensive process conducted by a cross-functional team. Team members (with different roles and responsibilities) work through a specific process to provide technical analysis of complex proposals, lengthy technical reports, and decision quality information to decision makers. Although Air Force acquisition experts have developed tools and procedures to conduct source selections, less focus has been put on team creation and

team dynamics. How this diverse team is created and how they work together on a day-to-day basis to award a contract is critical to a successful source selection.

An efficient source selection is one that is done quickly, thereby reducing resources, and one that is done correctly resulting in a contract with no protests. The Air Force has developed procedures, standardized documents, briefing templates, checklists, and computer based tools to conduct an efficient source selection.³ However, since much of what happens in a source selection, as with any negotiations, is more of an art than science, standardization and process improvements will always have limitations. Source selections are driven by people – the source selection team.

A source selection is conducted by a cross-functional team consisting of government employees from the contracting, program management, logistics, financial management, engineering, configuration management, and legal fields. Team members from each functional area have specific roles and responsibilities on the team. However, the team has one goal – awarding a contract to acquire supplies or services to meet the needs of the warfighter. Therefore, they must all work together for months, often putting in long hours, to reach this goal.

Through the study of team dynamics on three source selections conducted in the Agile Combat Support (ACS) Directorate, this paper answers the following question: How can an increased focus on the formation and empowerment of source selection teams contribute to the efficiency and success of Air Force source selections? Creating a source selection team whose members will perform well together is necessary to ensure an effective source selection. Since resources are always fixed within any organization, it is not always possible to create a team of experienced members. However, members are frequently assigned to teams based on current

workload or their need for gain experience for future advancement. Likewise, if a team is not functioning, this must be addressed and the team altered. A non-performing source selection team will struggle resulting in delays and possible mistakes in evaluations.

The over-riding concern in any source selection is that of a mistake in the evaluation process that will result in a successful protest by a contractor submitting an offer. A successful protest requires the Air Force to take corrective action possibly starting the process over. This concern of making a mistake and the formation of inexperienced teams have resulted in the establishment of many layers of management oversight and reviews. This lack of empowerment and management oversight can have a negative effect of slowing the process or creating lower performing teams knowing someone else will catch problems which in turn causes many rewrites of reports, reanalysis and delays in completing the source selection. An increased focus on the formation and empowerment of source selection teams can contribute to the efficiency and success of Air Force source selections by ensuring a well-integrated, high-performing team implements the source selection procedures and follows the source selection process accurately and quickly requiring less management involvement and the successful award of a contract with no protests.

This research paper will use a comparative case study framework to ascertain whether an increased focus on creating and empowering effective source selection teams can contribute to the efficiency and success of competitive acquisitions in the Air Force. The research paper will start by describing the source selection process. This will provide for an understanding of the structure where teams must perform and interact. In addition, the roles and responsibilities of the team members will be discussed. Using an explanatory research method, three source selections will be studied. The teams studied will be two source selections for legacy systems support programs and

one source selection for a new training system program. Team formation and empowerment will be discussed with the contracting officer and members of each team and examined focusing on how the team was selected and how they interacted within their team and with management and external reviewers. In addition, a management perspective will be discussed with senior leaders to gain insight into their thinking into team formation and their involvement with the teams during the source selection. Recommendations will be made which include factors to consider when forming source selection teams such as importance of experience, management skills, and technical skills and as well as considerations and techniques to implement to effectively empower teams. Finally, the research will present conclusions drawn from the comparative case study to determine what role team formation and empowerment played in completion of their source selections and how this information can be applied to other source selections in ACS to increase source selection efficiency.

SECTION 2: BACKGROUND

Rules, Regulations and Outcomes

FAR and Air Force FAR Supplements as well as DOD and Air Force Source Selection Procedures provide guidance on source selection rules and regulations. As stated in the DOD Source Selection Procedures: “The objective of these procedures is to ensure the Department’s source selection process delivers quality and timely products and services to the Warfighter and the Nation at the best value to the taxpayer.”⁴ The source selection regulations include specific rules and procedures how to communicate to potential offerors before and during the source selection, how to fairly evaluate offeror’s proposals, how to protect source selection information, and how to award a resulting contract.

Step 1, Strategy Development: development is where the source selection team is formed. The team formulates the best acquisition strategy to acquire the supplies or services to meet the warfighter need. The strategy is reviewed by acquisition experts and senior management and approved by the Program Executive Officer

Step 2: Request for Proposal (RFP) is explanation to industry what the Air Force intends to buy and the method it will buy it. The RFP also includes the proposed contract as well as the evaluation procedures and criteria the Air Force intends to use to select a source (a winner). Typically, the criteria stated in the RFP, that the contractor's proposals will be evaluated, are categorized into three Evaluation Factors (Technical, Cost/Price, and Past Performance).

Step 3: Initial Evaluation is the process where the source selection team evaluates the proposal of each contractor that submitted an offer in accordance with the source selection regulations and procedures and the criteria stated in the RFP. The team writes Evaluation Notices (EN) for every deficiency or weakness in the proposals as well as questions they may have on some aspect of the proposal.⁵ If the situation exists where a contractor's proposal has no weakness or deficiencies, and the team had no questions, and therefore there is a proposal that offers the best value to the government, the Source Selection Authority can choose to award the contract without discussions. In this case the process would stop here and the contracting officer would award the contract.

Step 4: Discussions: After the Initial Evaluation is completed, if necessary (the team did not award without discussions as explained above), the source selection team can hold discussions using the ENs written during the initial evaluation with the potential offerors to better understand their proposals and inform them of any deficiencies in their proposals. Discussion can be an

iterative process consisting of several meetings with the offeror proposals and are concluded when the offeror understands its deficiencies.

Step 5: Final Proposal Revisions: At the conclusion of discussions, the team will request updated proposals based upon the discussion. The offerors will submit their final proposal to the Air Force representing their best offer while correcting any deficiencies to their proposals.

Step 6: Final Evaluations: The source selection team will evaluate the offerors proposals again, present the results of the evaluation to the Source Selection Authority who will select a winner. The contracting officer will then award a contract and debrief the offerors that did not win.

Teams

While source selection teams can vary somewhat depending on complexity and dollar value, all of them use the same basic team structure. A typical structure as defined in the DOD Source Selection Procedures is shown in Figure 2.⁶ The positions indicated by a star in the figure are the most common positions that are included in most source selections and discussed in the case studies of this paper. As such, these are the positions of focus.

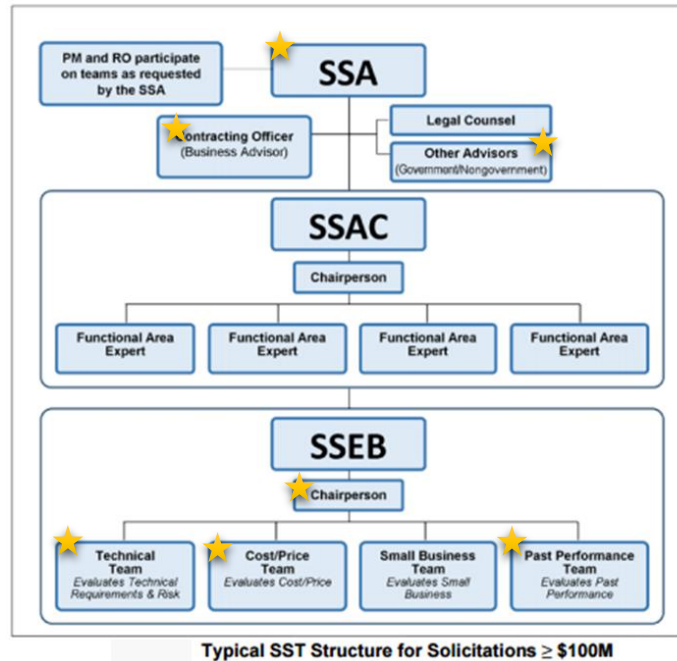


Figure 2 Typical Source Selection Team Structure⁷

Team Roles and Responsibilities

A source selection is conducted by a complex multi-functional team consisting of people from contracting, program management, logistics, financial management, engineering, configuration management, and legal. Team members from each functional area have specific roles and responsibilities on the team.

The **Source Selection Authority (SSA)** is the individual designated to make the best value decision.⁸ In other words, the SSA responsibilities include: Ensuring the proper and efficient conduct of the source selection process in accordance with this document and all applicable laws and regulations, appointing the chairperson for the SSEB and, when used, the SSAC, ensuring that personnel appointed to the team are knowledgeable of policy and procedures for properly and efficiently conducting the source selection, ensuring the SST members have the requisite acquisition experience, skills, and training necessary to execute the

source selection, and ensure the highest level of team membership continuity for the duration of the selection process.⁹

The **Source Selection Evaluation Board (SSEB)** can be considered the core of the source selection team. The SSEB members are the individuals evaluating the proposal and are the ones working together daily to complete the source selection. Although the Source Selection team is comprised of more people such as attorneys, advisors, the Source Selection Authority, than the members of the SSEB, when the source selection team is discussed, that is typically the SSEB. The SSEB comprised of a Chairperson and members.

The SSEB Chairperson is responsible for the overall management of the source selection and SSEB.¹⁰ In addition, the SSEB Chairperson establishes functional evaluation teams to support an efficient source selection evaluation and appoints chairpersons and members to the functional evaluation teams, subject to approval of the SSA. Ensure the evaluation process follows the evaluation criteria and ratings are applied consistently. The SSEB Chairperson also ensures the evaluation process follows the evaluation criteria and ratings stated in the RFP.¹¹

SSEB members are frequently organized into functional teams corresponding to specific evaluation criteria or factors (e.g., Technical Team, Cost/Price Team, Past Performance Team) stated in the RFP.¹² An SSEB for a source selection of moderately complex and less than \$300M like the teams included in the case study of this paper would be eight to fifteen people.

The **SSEB Technical Team** is led by the Technical Factor Chief and is typically a program or senior engineer. The Technical Team is divided into groups by the number of technical sub-factors (or evaluation criteria points) stated in the RFP that will be evaluated and is comprised of engineers or experts in the area that will be evaluated. Each sub-factor has a lead

and evaluators who evaluate a specific technical sub-factor in the contractor's proposal. If the RFP included three technical sub-factors, for example, that the team will use to evaluate a proposal, a team would be structured as follows:

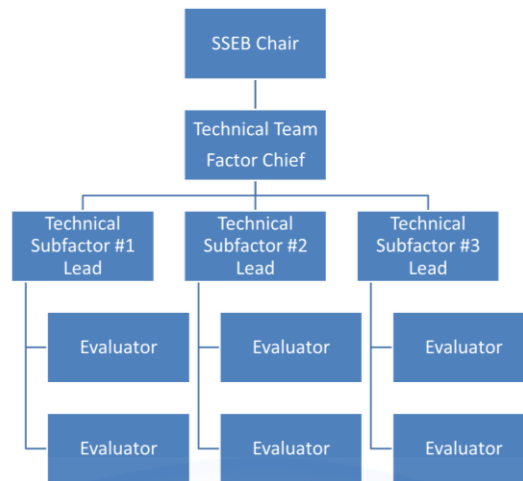


Figure 3 Typical SSEB Team Structure

The **SSEB Cost/Price Team** on smaller source selection and the ones included in the case studies of this paper are led by the Contracting Officer since pursuant to FAR 15.404-1, the Contracting Officer is responsible for evaluating the reasonableness of offered prices.¹³ However, cost or pricing expertise is a critical component in the source selection process, especially for high dollar, complex acquisitions.¹⁴ Therefore this team includes contract specialists and possibly financial managers or cost analysts. The Cost/Price team is responsible for analyzing the proposed prices in the proposals in accordance with the methodology stated in the RFP and determining the overall price the contractor is proposing to sell the supply or service requested in the RFP.

The **SSEB Past Performance Team** evaluates the offeror's past performance on other similar types of work to determine the likelihood, should they be selected, the contractor will accomplish the work they are proposing to do. The Past Performance Team is led by the Past

Performance Factor Chief and contains evaluators who review past contracts, conduct interviews, and evaluate surveys of the contractor's previous work and customers. Their analysis results in a confidence level they will be able to perform. Although the Past Performance team uses the technical expertise of the entire team, they typically operate independently and to their own schedule.

The SSA is required to establish a **Source Selection Advisor Council (SSAC)** on source selections greater than \$100M or optionally on smaller source selections. The SSAC is comprised of senior level personnel from different functional areas (i.e., contracting, engineering, logistics, etc.). The SSAC provides support to the SSA throughout the source selection process.¹⁵ They are the SSA's senior advisors and who also provides a written comparative analysis of offers and recommendation to the SSA.¹⁶

In addition to leading the Cost/Price Team, the **Contracting Officer** serves as the primary business advisor and principal guidance source for the entire source selection. Although the SSEB Chairperson is responsible for the overall management of the source selection, the Contracting Officer manages all business aspects of the acquisition and works with the SSEB Chairperson to ensure the evaluation is conducted in accordance with the evaluation criteria specified in the solicitation.¹⁷ Among other responsibilities, the Contracting Officer also ensures that procedures exist to safeguard source selection information and contractor bid or proposal information, approves appropriate access to source selection information and contractor bid or proposal information after consulting Legal Counsel before and after contract award, maintains the documents and source selection evaluation records, releases the final RFP and serves as the single point of contact to industry before and during the source selection.¹⁸

Legal counsel and other Advisors are also key to the success of the source selection team. Legal counsel is a key part of the source selection process by reviewing documentation for legal sufficiency as well as providing legal advice to the source selection team.¹⁹ In addition, the SSEB can use other advisors to aid in the source selection process to include subject matter experts, experienced source selection personnel, and other management personnel.

Although the Source Selection consists of many different members, there are typically three people that are critical to the success of the source selection and interact the most with each other to run the source selection (Figure 4). These three people are the SSEB Chairperson, the Contracting Officer, and the Technical Factor Team Lead.

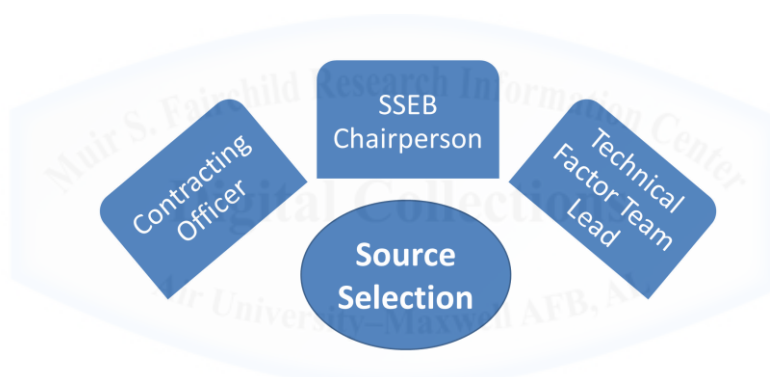


Figure 4 Core Source Selection Team Members

Team Selection

The DOD and Air Force Source Selection procedures have guidance to select source selection team members. DOD Procedures require that personnel assigned to a source selection shall consider the source selection their primary responsibility as such the source selection will take priority over any other work.²⁰ In addition, they recognize the importance of the Contracting Officer on a source selection by directing they should have prior experience in the source selection process.²¹ However, other than a training requirement for the source selection team, there is no guidance how to create a team. Ultimately team creation is left to the discretion of management as is the case with any other work assignment.

The core team is usually selected from the program team responsible for the overall acquisition of the system or service for the warfighters. This team is augmented as necessary for the source selection. Working within the resources available within the organization, management selects the team based on availability and experience. In addition, in an interview with a senior contract lead, she stressed the importance of ensuring the Contracting Officer has source selection experience.²² However, she also described when she selects team members she looks for getting experience vs giving experience.²³ A source selection has to have experience personnel but you also have to give the experience to personnel that don't have source selection experience to grow your workforce.

SECTION 3: CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

The paper at this point has examined the purpose of source selections and the procedures followed by the team charged to complete the source selection. In this section, the attention will turn to a case study of actual source selections. Three source selections conducted between 2015 through 2016 are examined from the perspective of team formation and team dynamics. Together with their interaction with management and external reviewers, they illustrate the focus and attention ACS has placed on teaming to produce results. Interviews were conducted with team members assigned to each source selection, addressing subjects of team formation, organization, operation and overall team dynamics. In the interviews, team members were questioned on an assessment of team performance. The studied source selections were ones within ACS's Simulator Division.

Team 1 Case Study
(CLS-1 Simulator Source Selection)

In the Team 1 Case Study, the author interviewed the Contracting Officer, the SSEB Chairperson, the Past Performance Chief, and Contract Specialist was conducted as part of this case study.²⁴ The CLS-1 Simulator Source Selection was responsible for awarding a contract to provide Contractor Logistics Support (CLS) for about 30 aircraft simulators. This case involved a re-competition of an existing contract that provided the same work. The successful contractor selected as a result of this source selection would maintain these simulators to ensure they are operable for training. The simulators are located at multiple Air Force bases all within the United States. As with most simulator contracts, the successful contractor would also be responsible for operating a Training System Service Center (TSSC). The TSSC is responsible for minor modifications to include logistic support, database upgrades, trainer hardware updates, software load updates, and configuration management of devices. The contract awarded from this source selection was a service contract and the approximate dollar value of the acquisition was \$25 million. The source selection lasted six months from RFP release to contract award.

This CLS-1 Simulator Source Selection was organized as described in the Section 2 (Figure 2) of this paper. Due to the dollar value, it did not have an SSAC. The SSEB chairperson was responsible for running the source selection. As stated in the RFP, the offeror's proposals were evaluated against three technical sub factors which formed the basis of the technical team organization. The CLS-1 Simulator team was specifically organized as follows:

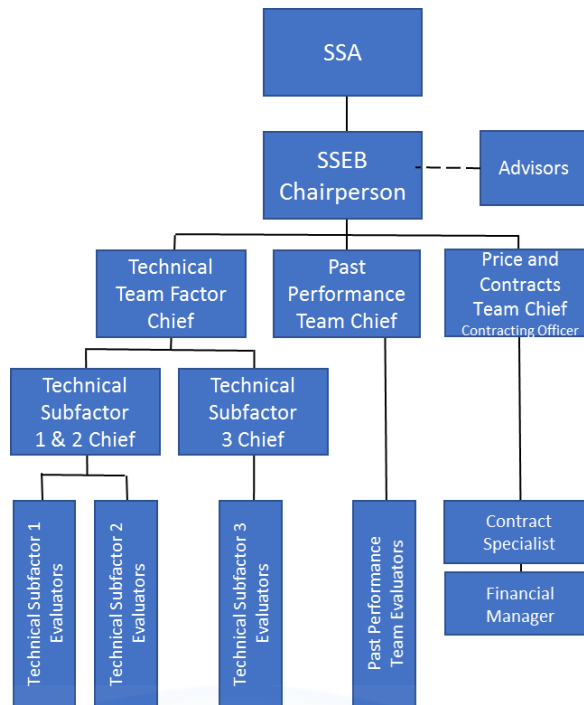


Figure 5 CLS-1 Simulator Source Selection Team Organization

This organization was typical of source selections conducted within ACS. Although larger and more technically complex source selections would have a Technical Sub-Factor Chief for each technical sub-factor that would be evaluated in the source selection, teams can dual hat certain jobs as this source selection did by combining the Sub-Factor 1 and Sub-Factor 2 Chief jobs. The key here was to not overload a single person with work.

The core members of the team (SSEB Chairperson, contracting officer, contract specialist, and Technical Factor Chief) were assigned to this simulator program before the source selection. They were all members of the program team responsible for the day-to-day management of CLS-1 program. The SSEB Chairperson was the Program Manager and Technical Factor Chief was the Program Chief Engineer. The core team of a source selection is usually formed from the program team. The contracting officer who served as the Price and

Contracts Team Chief was the program contracting officer. The contract specialist and the financial manager were also both on the program team. The rest of the team, evaluators and past performance chief were assigned to the Simulator Division but were not assigned to the CLS-1 program team. The entire team was formed with people already assigned to the Simulator Division. As with all source selections, the CLS-1 Source Selection team was advised with experts from the Source Selection Office (ACE), management from Simulator Division as well as ACS, legal, a contracting.

There was a change in personnel during the source selection. The SSEB Chairperson was change due to maternity leave. The team had completed the initial evaluations at the time of the change and the Past Performance Team Chief also assumed the role of the SSEB Chairperson. This had little impact on the performance of the team.

The AFLCMC Standard Process establishes 308 days to complete a >\$50M source selection which includes discussions (Step 4 in Figure 1).²⁵ Due to fewer reviews, a \$25M source selection is expected to be completed in 9 months.²⁶ The CLS-1 Simulator Source Selection team award the contract less than the standard time of 9 months for a source selection of this size. However, this team awarded the contract without discussions. Therefore, per the AFLCMC standard process, it would be expected the source selection would be completed in 4 and a half months. By this measure the team completed the source selection in about 45 days longer than expected. They did award the contract in time to meet the operational need.

After discussing the source selection team dynamics with the team as well as measuring their success against the time periods specified in the AFLCMC Standard Process, it was clear

this team was high performing, efficient team. Although they did not meet the expected time in the standard process, they awarded the contract to meet the operational need and had no protests.

The team members performed well together. They all worked in the Simulator Division and all knew each other prior to the source selection. The core team had worked together prior to the source selection and created the acquisition strategy and RFP together (Steps 1 and 2 from Figure 1). This team also had a mutual respect of each other's responsibility on the team. While the contracting officer had no experience on source selections as a contracting officer, she did work on a different source selection as the contract specialist. The SSEB Chairperson had extensive program management experience and was familiar with the simulators. The Contracting Officer and Contract Specialist had worked together prior to the source selection. In addition, referring to the core team shown in Figure 3, these team members together with the contract specialist and past performance chief all worked very well together.

Source selections generate voluminous reports, briefings, and other documentation. These documents are collectively referred to as the source selection record. While the evaluators and Team Chiefs are responsible for generating the record, the contracting officer with assistance from the legal counsel, review the entire record to ensure it conforms to the RFP. This document creation and document review process is shown in Figure 6. The strength and collective experience of this part of the team (in essence the "review team") has a significant impact in the length and success of a source selection. If the reports require significant rewrites, the source selection will take longer.

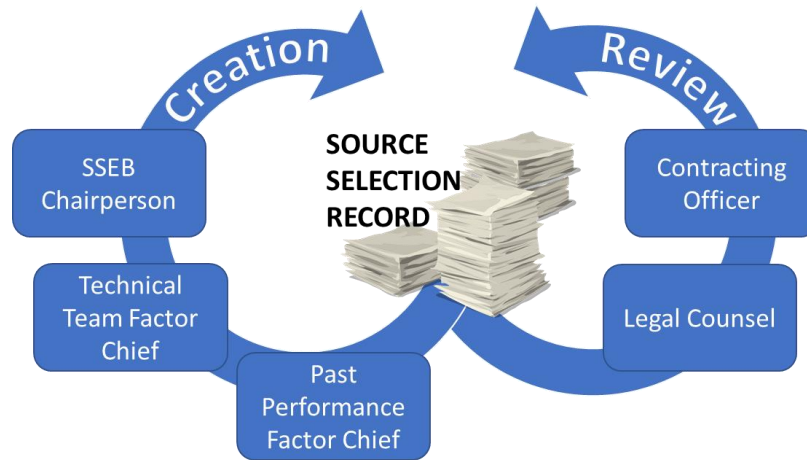


Figure 6 Source Selection "Review Team"

The legal counsel on the CLS-1 Simulator Source Selection was experienced with source selections, very detailed oriented, and hands-on working with the contracting officer and the team. Review of the documents were done quickly and efficiently. The combination of the contracting officer and legal counsel was very efficient on this team.

Outside reviewers and management did perform extensive reviews of the source selection record and offered many suggestions. This slowed down the work somewhat. However, the team felt like they were able to perform their jobs. As the overall manager of the source selection, the SSEB Chairperson was critical to success of the source selection. While the SSEB Chairperson did not have source selection experience he has excellent management skills. In an interview with the SSEB Chairperson, he said he approached the management like he does as a coach.²⁷ Each team member has something to do and something to say. He said you have to let people have their say and respect their role. In other words, good management and good team leadership.

Team 2 Case Study

(CLS-2 Simulator Source Selection)

For the Team 2 Case Study, the author interviewed the Contracting Officer, the SSEB Chairperson, the Past Performance Chief, and Contract Specialist was conducted as part of this case study.²⁸ The scope of the CLS-2 Source Selection was nearly identical to the CLS-1 Simulator Source Selection except, the simulator CLS was for a different aircraft platform. The contract awarded at the conclusion of this source selection, like the CLS-1 Simulator Source Selection, provided CLS for two different kind of simulators for the same aircraft platform. The total was also about 30 aircraft simulators across multiple sites in the United States. This was also a re-competition of an existing contract that provided the same work. This contract also would have a TSSC like the CLS-1 Simulator contract. This contract is a service contract and the approximate dollar value of the acquisition was also around \$20M. The source selection lasted 14 months from RFP release to contract award.

This CLS-2 Simulator Source Selection was organized as described in the Section 2 of this paper and was identical to the CLS-1 Simulator Source Selection. In addition, the source selection was conducted at the same time as the CLS-1 Simulator Source Selection. The primary difference in the team formation between the two teams was due to resource limitations, more people from outside Simulator Division were assigned to the team. The SSEB Chairperson was not the program team Program Manager. The Past Performance Chief and some evaluators were all from outside the organization. The contract specialist was also new to the team and was assigned to gain source selection experience. The Contracting Officer was the same for both the CLS-1 Simulator Source Selection and the CLS-2 Simulator Source Selection.

Unlike the CLS-1 Simulator Source Selection, not all the core members of the CLS-2 Simulator Source Selection team were assigned to this simulator program before the source selection. The CLS-2 Simulator Source Selection team was also advised with experts from the Source Selection Office (ACE), management from Simulator Division as well as ACS, legal, and contracting.

As stated in the previous case study, the AFLCMC Standard Process establishes about 9 months as the expected time to complete a source selection of this size. The CLS-2 Simulator Source Selection did not award without discussion as did the CLS-1 Simulator team. They completed the source selection five months longer than the standard time.

Although the RFPs and scope of work was nearly identical to the CLS-1 source selection and the source selection was conducted at the same time with the same contracting officer, the CLS-2 team struggled taking considerable more time to complete. After discussing the source selection team dynamics with the team, the formation of the team is the genesis of the problems with the team. As stated above, the team was formed from people outside of the program team and Simulators. Members of the core team (figure 3) had not worked together prior to the source selection. In addition, some evaluators and the Past Performance Chief were not assigned to the Simulator Program Office prior to the source selection. The contracting officer and SSEB Chair felt that the team members from outside the organization had less of a stake in the source selection success because they did not participate in developing the acquisition strategy nor will they have to manage the contract after it was awarded. These team members would return to their offices after contract award. There was also less respect for each other's roles in the source selection which caused conflict and slowed the process. Additional management attention also had to be applied to this team to ensure the overall source selection was successful.

The source selection review as shown in Figure 4 above was different as a result of the team dynamics. The CLS-2 Simulator Source Selection team had a different legal counsel with less experience. Therefore, the combined experience of the contracting officer and legal counsel was less. This resulted in the contracting officer to increase the time she took to review the record at the same time she was working the CLS-1 Source Selection. This resulted in more re-writes which in turn created more tension. In the interviews with the team, a team member felt the team dynamics were at a point where it would be difficult to fix.

Due to the length of the source selection and the availability of personnel from the outside organizations, there was an opportunity to change most of the core team at discussions (Step 4 in Figure 1). The SSEB from the CLS-1 Simulator Source Selection took over as the SSEB on the CLS-2 Simulator Source Selection. In addition, he assumed the role of the Past Performance Chief together with evaluators from the CLS-1 team. In addition, the contract specialist was replaced. These key changes transformed the team. The team was formed from the Simulator Division that had extensive system knowledge. This fresh start after the start of discussion resulted in successful contract award one month faster than the AFLCMC standard process for discussion (Step 4 in figure 1 to award, Step 6). The team also operated with a much smaller group consisting of five people. (SSEB Chairperson, Contracting Officer, Contract Specialist, Technical Factor Chief, and Past Performance evaluator)

The SSEB Chairperson that took over at the discussions point, made it clear the Past Performance Chair should have experience and knowledge of what you are buying. This lack of system knowledge and inexperience created many re-writes which in turn created more reviews to the source selection record. In addition, his management and leadership skills greatly

improved the team dynamics. This smaller more efficient team gelled and successfully awarded the contract.

Team 3 Case Study ***(Training System Source Selection)***

For the Team 3 Case Study, the author interviewed the SSEB Chairperson and Contract Specialist as part of this case study.²⁹ This source selection was responsible for awarding a contract to produce approximately 30 new training systems in addition to providing CLS for the delivered systems. Unlike the other two source selections studied in this paper, this was a new contract and now a follow-on effort. The simulators delivered under this contract will be located at multiple Air Force bases all within the United States. This contract is a supply contract and the approximate dollar value of the acquisition was \$50 million. The source selection lasted five months from RFP release to contract award. For the purposes of this paper this source selection is called Training System Source Selection.

This Source Selection was organized as described in the Section 2 of this paper. Due to the dollar value, they did not have an SSAC however it did have additional reviews. Source selections over \$50M must use a multi-functional independent review team (MIRT) as part of the overall review process.³⁰ The MIRT is comprised of experts from various fields including engineering, contracting, program management, source selection experts, and legal. This review team is in addition to other reviews during the source selection. In addition, due to the complex nature of this training system, the team used subject matter experts (SME) to advise the evaluation team. The SMEs assigned to the team were actual operators of the platform the

training will be used. This addition provided the warfighter perspective into the training systems that would be acquired as a result of this source selection.

The SSEB chairperson was responsible for running the source selection. As stated in the RFP, the offeror's proposals were evaluated against two technical sub factors which formed the basis of the technical team organization. This team did not evaluate past performance. The Training System Source Selection team was organized as follows:

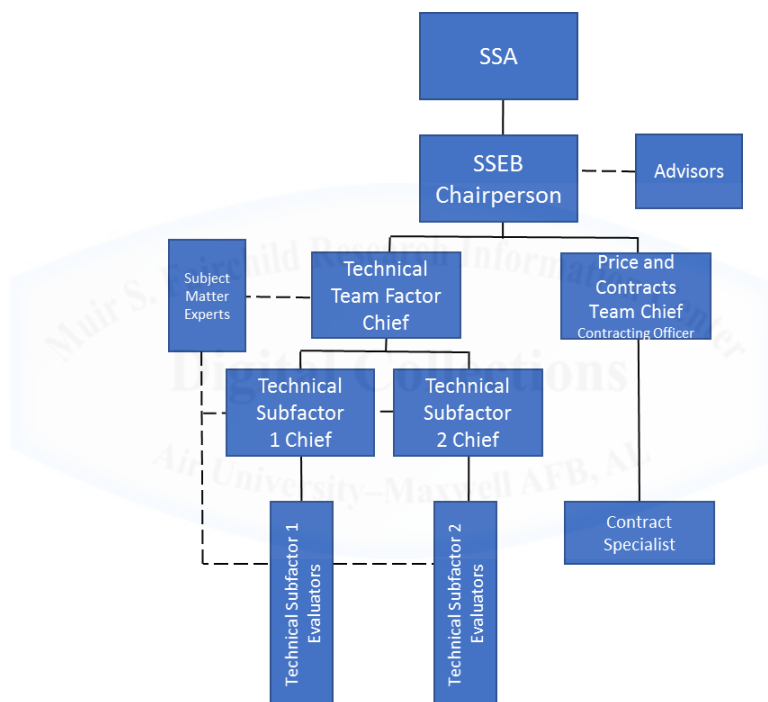


Figure 7 Training System Source Selection Team Organization

As with the other source selections studied for this paper, the core members of the team (SSEB Chairperson, contracting officer, contract specialist, and Technical Factor Chief) were assigned to this simulator program before the source selection. The evaluators were not originally part of the program team prior to the source selection. However, they were experts in the type of training system.

This team used a variation of the standard source selection process. As a result, during the acquisition development step (figure 1) of the source selection, the team met with senior level legal, source selection experts, and contracting personnel multiple times to ensure buy-in and approval of the strategy. The strategy was thoroughly vetted. The SSEB Chairperson believed that the work the team did to create the strategy and convince senior management to approve the strategy not only resulted management developed a trust of the team, it also made the team more effective and functional. She believes the team worked hard to make it a success since they put so much work into the strategy even before the RFP was released. Everyone on the team wanted it to be a success. The same team members that worked the acquisition strategy, formed the source selection team. This team was high performing before the source selection even started.³¹

Although the SSEB Chairperson acknowledged she did not have extensive source selection experience, she recognized a key role of the SSEB Chairperson was to keep the team moving meeting deadlines in the process. She stated you can't let part of the team languish or the rest of the team will suffer and it is hard to recover and get back on track.³² In addition, she relied on the Contracting Officer for business advice during the entire process.

Due to the dollar value and interest of this source selection the work of this team was extensively reviewed. However, due to the experience level of the core team and the effectiveness of the entire team together with through vetting of the acquisition strategy, the SSEB Chairperson did not believe it was necessarily intrusive to the team finishing the source selection. This is evidenced by completing the source selection in 153 days.³³ which is far less than the AFLCMC Standard Process establishes 308 days to complete a >\$50M source selection.³⁴

Overall, the Training System Source Selection team was effective. This was primarily because the team worked together prior to the source selection, worked with management and reviewers prior to the source selection to thoroughly vet the strategy, and had a sense of common purpose to complete the source selection accurately and quickly. The team was highly motivated to make their strategy succeed and buy the training systems the warfighter needed.³⁵

Management Perspective

As with any team project such as a source selection, people involved directly management or senior leaders may have a different perspective. An interview by the author with Ms. Victoria Fry, Senior Contracting Official for ACS Directorate, was conducted to gain an additional contracting management perspective. Ms. Fry has extensive source selection experience in addition to being the senior contracting official. As stated earlier in this paper, Ms. Fry believes there needs to be a balance between getting experience and giving experience.³⁶ From her perspective, not only does she have to ensure the right people are assigned to a source selection to get the job done, she also must look to grow the workforce. Ideally a contracting officer assigned to a source selection team would have served on another source selection team as a contract specialist.³⁷ Although she recognizes the importance of experience on a source selection team, she also must work with the resources available to her.

Ms. Fry recognizes management has had a reach into the operation of source selection teams. However, she believes this is improving in ACS.³⁸ She stated that source selections are unique and should not follow standard review or staffing processes within the directorate.³⁹ She also believes that management has a role to play in coaching, working for consensus and working out differences between team members when issues arise.⁴⁰ In addition, as the senior

contracting official within ACS, she believes as part of established contract reviews, she has a role in reviewing the source selection record.⁴¹

An interview by the author with Mr. John Brannan, who lead the Acquisition Center of Excellence (ACE)⁴² contracting division before he retired in 2013, was conducted to gain a management perspective from the source selection office. Not only does he have a management perspective being a senior leader in contracting at AFLCMC, but also has observed and worked with many teams in that role. In his role at the ACE he believes that the biggest problem with the creating effective source selection teams is that many in management feel that source selection teams are made up of a collection of functions such as engineering or contracting and not people.⁴³ He believes management should look to create source selection teams with people that not only have experience but also with people that have the right attitude and energy.⁴⁴ Someone that wants to work a source selection. In addition, he believes good communication skills are important as well as critical thinking skills when forming teams.⁴⁵ Mr. Brannan has seen that too many times management thinks a source selection is a surge activity or an additional duty and this became the workload model. Overall, source selection teams comprised of experienced personnel, especially the contracting officer, who have the right attitude and skills will succeed. Further, many times management over staffs a source selection with the thinking of more is better.⁴⁶ During his time at the ACE, he would constantly tell management, that a small team is always more effective.⁴⁷

Overall, Figure 7 below illustrates what Mr. Brannan believes are critical aspects of a successful source selection team.



Figure 8 Aspects of Successful Source Selection Team

(This figure was derived from the interview with Mr. John Brannan, Contracting Lead at the Acquisition Center of Excellence 2009-2013, Air Force Life Cycle Management Center, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, by the author, 18 Jan 2017)

Finally, the author interviewed Col Daniel Marticello, Chief, Simulators Program Office, Agile Combat Support Directorate, AFLCMC was conducted to gain the perspective a senior program management leadership. Col Marticello is responsible for managing all of the programs within the Simulator Program Office. Unlike Ms. Fry's perspective of a functional support role in contracting, Col Marticello's perspective is one from a lead program manager. He typically is involved in selecting the members of a source selection team and specifically the SSEB Chairperson. When selecting people to work a source selection, Col Marticello looks for experience and for the SSEB Chairperson, someone with management skills.⁴⁸ However, due to limited resources and the number of source selections conducted in the Simulator Program Office, he cannot always have his most experienced personnel on every source selection. He therefore considers the criticality of the program and higher management interest in the source selection as well when staffing a source selection.⁴⁹ Col Marticello looks for the right balance of experience on the team with the most experienced people being the SSEB Chairperson and the Contracting Officer.⁵⁰ It is not as critical to have experienced technical evaluators. However, he

also believes it is important to give people source selection experience to grow the workforce. As when forming any team, he believes looking at personalities of people is important to help determine if the team will work well together but acknowledges you can't always know if a team will work well together until they start working.⁵¹

Col Marticello believes the SSEB Chairperson runs the day-to-day operation of the team. He believes his role is to hold the that person accountable for completing the source selection. He holds the team to the schedule and therefore can head off problems if they are not progressing and can be the expeditor to get the team moving if necessary.⁵² Since he is involved in many source selections, he can see what is and what isn't working on teams and communicate this to all of the teams. Further this perspective lets him see problems or issues with the overall source selection process. He can then work with the teams and the ACE to improve the source selection process. He also works as in an advisory role to the team. Col Marticello lets the teams work and lets them work through problems in team dynamics. However, if necessary, he would make changes to team membership if they were not getting the job done.⁵³

Col Marticello discussed three points the Air Force Chief of Staff described at the 2017 Weapons and Tactics Conference (WEPTAC) he attended at Nellis Air Force Base in January that are critical to a successful leadership and how they apply to source selection teams and management's role in source selections. The three points to successful teams are ensure one person is in charge and accountable, ensure everyone on the team knows what they are trying to achieve, and finally use milestones and metrics to measure success.⁵⁴ The SSEB Chairperson is in charge and he holds them accountable, everyone on the team must know what they are achieving, and he holds the SSEB Chairperson and team to the schedule to measure the progress and ensure the job gets done.⁵⁵

SECTION 4: CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

Although this research paper only studied three source selection teams, the case study taken with the management perspective with ACS and the ACE, some key concepts and trends on team formation and empowerment are illustrated. There are five common principles revealed in the case studies and management interviews that demonstrate an increased focus on the formation and empowerment of source selection teams contributes to the efficiency and success of source selections.

1. Early team formation from within the program team helps ensure successful team dynamics and therefore an effective team. Both the CLS-1 team and the New Training System team were almost exclusively created with members from the program team within the organization. The people that work the day-to-day operation of the program are also the same people that were on the source selection team. These people have a vested interest in seeing the program succeed as the contract award from the source selection is the one they must manage after award. They are familiar with the systems they are acquiring and have worked together prior to the source selection. A common thread in my discussions with team members and management was the core source selection team not only needs to be familiar with what the team is buying but also needs to be part of the organization.

The CLS-2 team had key members such as the SSEB Chairperson and Past Performance Chief who were pulled from other organizations to work the source selection. The team did not function smoothly from the beginning and only recovered when personnel were changed. The balance between getting experience and giving experience was not there. The effective team's formation also happened early in the process at the Acquisition Strategy Stage. This early team

formation gave the team time to work together prior to the source selection creating a strategy. The DOD Source Selection Procedures also state all members of the team shall be designated early in the source selection process.⁵⁶ The New Training System Team had the additional benefit of having a common purpose to see the unique strategy they develop succeed. They were all motivated to see it work. Forming a team early in the process from people within the program team ensures team cohesiveness. They will have already worked together for months prior to the actual start of the source selection (Step 3, in Figure 1). In addition, all the team members will have a stake in the outcome of the source selection. This will lead to an efficient source selection.

2. Creating a team from experts in what they are buying is critical to success. A consistent theme during the interviews of team members was the importance of a team that knows what they are buying. If you are buying a simulator system, the team should have members that know simulators. This goes beyond the technical evaluators. A knowledge of the systems is key on the Past Performance team as well. The team must determine if a contractor's past performance is relevant to what they are buying now. A system expert will be more successful in this evaluation. If the source selection is acquiring a complex system, Subject Matter Experts can supplement and advise the evaluation teams. They bring the technical or operational expertise to the team. This was successfully done on the New Training System Source Selection Team. The use of experts in a source selection team reduces the time necessary to learn about the system that is being acquired which in turn reduces conflict on the team and lowers time to complete the source selection – increases efficiency.

3. Experience is essential in key positions on the source selection team. The DOD acknowledges the importance of experience in creating successful source selection teams. The

DOD Source Selection Procedures specifically states that key members of the team should have source selection experience.⁵⁷ These are the core team members shown in Figure 3 with the addition of the SSA. Experience is just the foundation. In the three case studies, not all the core members had extensive source selection experience. However, when combined they had the right experience and skills to be successful. The CLS-1 team had an experienced legal counsel that could support the Contracting Officer. The New Training System Team SSEB Chairperson did not have extensive source selection experience but had strong management skills which combined with the Technical Factor Chief and Contracting Officer's experience level, ensured the team was successful. Source selection experience is only necessary for the core team members. Evaluators on the team as well as the contract specialist can have less source selection experience. These positions are ones where people can gain source selection experience to take on more critical roles in the future. High combined experience on the core team will ensure the process and procedures are followed, documents are written well the first time, and lessen the likelihood the team the overall team gets frustrated and bogged down all leading to a more efficient source selection.

4. Strong management skills are needed in SSEB Chairperson position. The SSEB Chairperson is responsible for the overall management of the source selection.⁵⁸ While the SSEB Chairpersons on the teams studied in this paper did not have extensive source selection experience, the chairpersons on the CLS-1 (who also took over on the CLS-2 later in the process) and the New Training System Teams had good management skills. They could keep the team moving in the right direction as well as keep the team working together. If the Contracting Officer has experience to keep the overall experience of the core team (Figure 3) balanced together with an SSEB with strong management skills, the team will be successful. As

with any team, when the leader has good management skills, the team will succeed. A source selection is no different. If the SSEB Chairperson has strong management skills, the team will stay on track and complete the source selection on schedule.

5. Establishing an effective team contributes to an empowered team. In only very specific cases, did the teams studied for this paper feel like management did not empower them to accomplish the source selection. Those cases involved staffing of documents through normal staffing procedures instead of using the source selection structure. While the CLS-2 team had more management involvement in reviewing documents and managing the source selection itself, this could be a result of the team initially struggling. Reviewers and management were more involved because there was a perception it was needed. This is also evident in Ms. Fry's comment that she has a role and responsibility to ensure the source selection record and documents are accurate and complete and Col Marticello's comment regarding holding the team to a schedule. If management sees the team is not getting the job done, they will become more involved.

While there were other specific examples of the standard review process encroaching on the source selection process, this was not widespread and in my interview with Ms. Fry, she acknowledged this is happening less.⁵⁹ As with any complex team, the roles and responsibilities can blur at times. However, in the source selection teams studied in this paper, when this occurred, they were quickly resolved. Looking at the attributes of a successful source selection team as discussed with Mr. Brannan, the successful teams in this study met them which resulted in an efficient source selection.

SECTION 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The objective of a source selection is for the Air Force to select a contractor that will deliver quality and timely products and services to the Warfighter and the Nation at the best value to the taxpayer.⁶⁰ The DOD and Air Force have established rules and procedures to conduct source selections. However, it is a cross-functional team that actually uses these procedures to accomplish the objective of a source selection. Through a study of three source selection teams and additional insight gained from acquisition management, the paper shows that increasing the focus on creating an effective team and empowering that team to achieve the objective of a source selection ensures success.

Taking the analysis and principles from this research, this paper recommends management consider the following when creating source selection teams.

Form the team early in the acquisition process using the existing acquisition program team to create the core source selection team of the SSEB Chairperson, Contracting Officer, and Technical Factor Chief (Figure 4). Early formation of the team in the process will create a buy in from the team from strategy development through the source selection which will create a more functional team as shown on the New Training System Team.

Careful consideration should be given to balance the source selection experience between these team members with the SSEB Chairperson possessing the overall management skills and the Contracting Officer having the stronger source selection experience. The Technical Factor chief should have source selection experience and be knowledgeable in the system or service the source selection is acquiring. In addition to the core team members, the Past Performance Chief should have technical knowledge as well. The skills and experienced described above in

addition to the experience of the legal counsel will ensure the source selection is thoroughly documented (Figure 5).

When creating a source selection team, consideration should be given to the attributes of a successful team shown in Figure 8 with the overall premise that a team should be formed considering the individual's capabilities not merely a collection of functional capabilities. In addition, if known, consideration should be given toward personalities of the core source selection team members as an indication of how well they will work together.

Management should empower the source selection team to accomplish their job. It is important to set expectations early with the core team and at the start of the source selection (Step 3 shown in Figure 3) with the entire team. The SSEB Chairperson runs the day-to-day operation of the source selection with everyone working toward the common objective of successfully selecting a contractor to produce the products and services needed by the Warfighter. Management should hold the SSEB Chairperson and team accountable for completing the source selection. In addition, management should advise and counsel the team through personal conflicts that could arise in the team and make changes to the team if necessary.

While the process to conduct a source selection is well defined in regulations and procedures, a successful Air Force source selections starts with an effective empowered team.

Notes

¹ DOD Source Selection Procedures, April 2016, <http://www.acq.osd.mil/dpap/policy/policyvault/USA004370-14-DPAP.pdf>.

² Federal Acquisition Regulation, Part 6 Competition Requirements, 6.101 <http://farsite.hill.af.mil/reghtml/regs/far2afmcfars/fardfars/far/06.htm>.

³ These include the Air Force Source Selection Procedures, the Air Force Life Cycle Management Center (AFLCMC) Standard Process For Contract Award (Source Selection) Competitive Acquisition Source Selections >\$1M, and EZ Source computer based source selection tool developed by the Acquisition Center of Excellence at Wright Patterson AFB, OH.

⁴ DOD Source Selection Procedures, April 2016, <http://www.acq.osd.mil/dpap/policy/policyvault/USA004370-14-DPAP.pdf>.

⁵ AFFARS Mandatory Procedures (MP) 5315.3. Source Selection: Air Force Source Selection Mandatory Procedures, 17 May 2016. [http://farsite.hill.af.mil/reghtml/regs/far2afmcfars/af_afmc/affars/MP5315.3_\(CPM_16-C-04\).pdf](http://farsite.hill.af.mil/reghtml/regs/far2afmcfars/af_afmc/affars/MP5315.3_(CPM_16-C-04).pdf).

⁶ DOD Source Selection Procedures, April 2016, <http://www.acq.osd.mil/dpap/policy/policyvault/USA004370-14-DPAP.pdf>.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid

²² Ms. Victoria Fry (Chief of Contracts, Agile Combat Support, Air Force Life Cycle Management Center, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base), interview with author, 19 Jan 2017.

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ms. Kerisha Wordlaw (Contracting Officer), Mr. Jaron Yarbrough (Program Manager), Mr. Travis McCulough (Contract Specialist), interview with author, 12 Jan 2017.

²⁵ Air Force Life Cycle Management Center (AFLCMC) Standard Process For Contract Award (Source Selection) Competitive Acquisition Source Selections >\$1M. 22 Aug 2016 http://afacpo.com/AQDocs/Contract_Award_Source_Selection.doc.

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Mr. Jaron Yarbrough (Program Manager), interview with author, 12 Jan 2017.

²⁸ Ms. Kerisha Wordlaw (Contracting Officer), Ms. Jaron Yarbrough (Program Manager), Capt Ron Jenkins (USAF, Contracts Manager), interview with author, 12 Jan 2017.

²⁹ Ms. Janet Sandner (Program Manager, Simulators Program Office, Agile Combat Support), interview with author, 3 Feb 17.

³⁰ Air Force Federal Acquisition Regulation (AFFARS) 5301.9001(b), http://farsite.hill.af.mil/reghtml/regs/far2afmcfars/af_afmc/affars/5301.htm#P316_21420.

³¹ Ms. Janet Sandner (Program Manager, Simulators Program Office, Agile Combat Support), interview with author, 3 Feb 17.

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Air Force Life Cycle Management Center (AFLCMC) Standard Process For Contract Award (Source Selection) Competitive Acquisition Source Selections >\$1M. 22 Aug 2016

http://afacpo.com/AQDocs/Contract_Award_Source_Selection.doc.

³⁵ Interview with Ms. Janet Sandner, Program Manager, Simulators Program Office, Agile Combat Support, Air Force Life Cycle Management Center, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, 3 Feb 17.

³⁶ Ms. Janet Sandner (Program Manager, Simulators Program Office, Agile Combat Support), interview with author, 3 Feb 17.

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² The Acquisition Center of Excellence (ACE) is the office that assists every source selection team at Wright Patterson AFB. It is comprised of source selection experts from multiple disciplines including contracting, pricing, logistics, engineering, and program management.

⁴³ Mr. John Brannan (Contracting Lead at the Acquisition Center of Excellence 2009-2013, Air Force Life Cycle Management Center, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base), interview with author, 18 Jan 2017.

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Col Daniel Marticello (USAF, Chief Simulator Program Office, Agile Combat Support Directorate, Air Force Life Cycle Management Center, Wright-Patterson AFB, OH), interview with author, 9 Feb 17.

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ DOD Source Selection Procedures, April 2016, <http://www.acq.osd.mil/dpap/policy/policyvault/USA004370-14-DPAP.pdf>.

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Ms. Victoria Fry (Chief of Contracts, Agile Combat Support, Air Force Life Cycle Management Center, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base), interview with author, 19 Jan 2017.

⁶⁰ DOD Source Selection Procedures, April 2016, <http://www.acq.osd.mil/dpap/policy/policyvault/USA004370-14-DPAP.pdf>.

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