

IN BEST VALUE PROCUREMENT WHERE TECHNICAL IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN PRICE/COST, CAN A LOWER TECHNICAL SCORE WIN?

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The answer to the question posed in the title is “YES” depending on the scores and the price/cost in the proposals. A proposal that was lower in technical *and* significantly lower in price can be awarded the contract. See *Highlight Tech., Inc.*, B-424060.2 May 22, 2026, a case at the Government Accountability Office (“GAO”) for a good example.

The General Services Administration (“GSA”) issued a request for quotations for enterprise data analytics shared services operations and maintenance support. The solicitation stated that the GSA was going to issue a call order with fixed price and labor contract line items. The Request for Quotations stated that selection was to be made on a best value tradeoff basis, considering price and the following non-price factors in descending order of importance:

1. Technical capability
2. Staffing
3. Past Performance

GSA received three quotations, and Highlight Technologies was advised it was not selected, but FedTec was the awardee. Highlight protested, and GSA terminated the call order and made a new source selection between Highlight and FedTec, with the following evaluation and award:

	Highlight (protester)	FedTec (awardee)
Technical capability	Excellent	Good
Staffing	Excellent	Good
Past Performance	Excellent	Good
Price	\$42,874,971	\$33,924,699

The Source Selection Authority considered the relative merits of these quotes and concluded that none of the evaluated advantages in Highlight’s quotation under the non-price factors justified an \$8,950,272 (26.4%) price premium. FedTec’s quotation was the best value under the solicitation, and this protest followed.

First, Highlight protested the price evaluation, asserting that the agency included an optional supplemental labor line item, and misled it into overstating its price quote. The GAO noted that even by adjusting this error, Highlight would not have had a substantial chance of receiving this award, therefore the protester had failed to demonstrate it was prejudiced by the treatment of this optional labor line item.

Highlight also challenged the best value tradeoff, stating it was unreasonably based on price alone, which Highlight asserted was the least important selection factor. GAO disagreed, noting that the solicitation did not specify that price was the least important factor. The Source Selection Official considered Highlight’s relative technical merit under each non-price evaluation factor, discussing the strengths and weaknesses in each quote, “and concluded that the

assessed advantages in Highlight’s quotation *did not justify an \$8.9 million, or 26 percent price premium.*” (Emphasis added). Fed Tec’s “good” quotation was adequate to meet the solicitation’s requirements, and the strengths in Highlight’s “excellent” quotation “did not justify paying the evaluated price premium when compared to the benefits of FedTec’s “good” quotation.” The GAO noted that it “has consistently stated there is no need for extensive documentation of every consideration factored into a tradeoff decision; rather [the agency must show] it was aware of the relative merits and costs of the competing quotations and that the source selection was reasonably based. GAO held that GSA’s selection was reasonable and denied the protest.

Takeaway. With an offeror demonstrating a “good” technical proposal with a significantly lower price than an “excellent” technical proposal, the Agency can examine the merits and costs, and sometimes will find that the lower cost proposal meets its needs at a much lower price. Technical alone is not the only thing to be considered in a best value procurement.

For an even larger price discrepancy case, but with the same result (31 percent lower price deemed best value, even though technical was significantly lower rated), see *Tactical Engineering & Analysis, Inc.*, B-423721, Dec. 5, 2025. The results were as follows:

	Tactical (protester)	TMC Technologies (awardee)
Technical	Outstanding	Marginal
Past Performance	Satisfac. Confidence	Limited Confidence
Evaluated Price	\$112,886,061	\$85,702,813

The Source Selection Authority found that TMC’s proposal represented the best value to the government, even though Tactical’s proposal was rated much higher than, and provided technical advantages over TMC’s proposal. But TMC’s price was 31 percent lower, and the advantages of Tactical’s proposal were not worth the price premium.

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