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| Informational Guidance |

**IG5315.308   
Source Selection Decision Document (SSDD) Guide**

***December 2008***

This guide integrates ideas and lessons learned from a cross-section of the contracting community to provide practical guidance for developing source selection decision documents.

### Table of Contents

|  |
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|  |
| I. [Introduction](#intro) 2 |
| A. What this Guide will answer 2 |
| B. What is in this Guide? 2 |
| II. [Description and Overview](#Descr) 2 |
| A. What is a SSDD? 2 |
| B. What is the purpose of the SSDD? 3 |
| C. When is it required? 3 |
| D. Who prepares it? 3 |
| E. Who reviews and who signs it? 3 |
| F. Who receives a copy of the SSDD? 4 |
| G. How does the SSDD differ for LPTA, PPT, and Full Tradeoff? 4 |
| III. [SSDD Objectives](#SSDD) 4 |
| IV. [SSDD Contents (in order of appearance)](#ssddco) 4 |
| V. [Suggested DOs and DON’Ts](#vsugg) 5 |
| A. DOs 5 |
| B. DON’Ts 7 |
| VI. [Checklist for a Complete and Accurate SSDD](#vicheck) 8 |
| VII. [Administrative](#viiadm) 9 |
| VIII. [Redacted SSDD Samples](#viii) 10 |

**I. Introduction**

This Guide is designed to assist Source Selection Evaluation Teams (SSET) in preparing a Source Selection Decision Document (SSDD) for the Source Selection Authority (SSA). There is no requirement to follow this format. It is one approach that you can use. Current guidance for preparing a SSDD is in [FAR 15.308](http://farsite.hill.af.mil/reghtml/regs/far2afmcfars/fardfars/far/15.htm), [AFFARS 5315.308](http://farsite.hill.af.mil/reghtml/regs/far2afmcfars/af_afmc/affars/5315.htm), and [MP5315.308](https://cs.eis.af.mil/airforcecontracting/knowledge_center/Pages/5315-main.aspx#MP), paragraph 7.12. This Guide will assist you in clearly explaining and documenting the reasoning used by the SSA to reach a decision.

The SSDD is the pivotal document of the source selection decision. This SSDD Guide supplements the AFFARS and MP by providing additional information on what to document in the SSDD to effectively convey the SSA’s thought process to determine which offeror(s) will be awarded the contract(s) from a competitive negotiated acquisition. This is an integrated assessment comparing offerors first to the evaluation criteria and then to each other on many different levels.

Redacted SSDDs are releasable to debriefed offerors in order to provide them meaningful feedback. Neither statutes nor the FAR specify detailed standards for the SSDD. Standards or guidance for SSDDs have been largely derived from protest decisions. If there are any challenges to a source selection decision, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) or the U.S. Court of Federal Claims will first look at the SSDD. Given its criticality, writing a SSDD is a task worthy of concentrated time and effort.

**A. What this Guide will answer.** This Guide will take you through developing a sound SSDD. It also lists the SSDD’s contents and will help you answer further questions such as:

* What is the purpose of a SSDD?
* What are key aspects of a SSDD?
* How does the SSDD differ for Lowest Price Technically Acceptable (LPTA), Performance Price Tradeoff (PPT), and Full Tradeoff acquisitions?
* What are some examples of quality SSDDs?

**B. What is in this Guide?** It provides guidance for writing SSDDs along with redacted examples of SSDDs. The guidance is complemented with practical “dos”, “don’ts”, and a checklist for ensuring a high quality SSDD. The examples are for illustrative purposes. DO NOT COPY anything since the wording may not be applicable to your acquisition. Also, ***SSAs vary in the amount of detail they require. You and your SSA must decide what applies to your particular source selection, and how much detail is appropriate****.*

**II. Description and Overview**

**A. What is a SSDD?** The SSDD is the SSA’s written record documenting the rationale to justify and explain the award decision. This “single summary” document reflects the SSA’s comparative assessment and decision and includes the rationale for any business judgments – tradeoffs made or relied on by the SSA – including benefits associated with additional costs. The SSDD supports selection of the best value proposal consistent with the stated evaluation criteria. It clearly explains the decision and documents the reasoning used by the SSA to reach the decision. When reading a well written, stand alone SSDD, an individual should understand why the SSA made the decision.

**B. What is the purpose of the SSDD?** The SSA has made a critical decision for the source selection. While the SSA must use briefing charts, reports, analyses, and recommendation(s) from the Source Selection Evaluation Team (SSET) and the Source Selection Advisory Council (SSAC), when used, to make a decision, the SSDD must capture the SSA’s subjective reasoning and resulting decision in a separate document. The SSDD captures the rationale for his or her judgment, the tradeoffs made or relied upon by the SSA, and the benefits related to any additional costs for the tradeoffs (if the latter was applicable). It also demonstrates how the best value decision was made in accordance with the evaluation criteria stated in the Request for Proposal (RFP). In the event of a protest, the GAO cannot conclude whether the SSA rendered a reasonable and fair decision without the justifying support presented in the SSDD. Therefore, this document is critical to interested parties, the GAO and the U.S. Court of Federal Claims.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**C. When is it required?** A SSDD is required for all competitively negotiated acquisitions. This means Lowest Price Technically Acceptable (LPTA), Performance Price Tradeoff (PPT), and Full Tradeoff negotiated acquisitions. If the source selection uses the Simplified Source Selection Report (SSSR) as prescribed in [MP5315.308](https://cs.eis.af.mil/airforcecontracting/knowledge_center/Pages/5315-main.aspx#MP), paragraph 7.11, the SSDD is contained in Section IV of the SSSR. Otherwise, it is a separate document, but is nonetheless mandatory ([FAR 15.308](http://farsite.hill.af.mil/reghtml/regs/far2afmcfars/fardfars/far/15.htm)).

**D. Who prepares it?** The SSET Chairperson, the SSAC Chair, when used and Contracting Officer (CO) usually collaborate to prepare the SSDD for the SSA’s signature, unless otherwise directed by the SSA ([MP5315.3](https://cs.eis.af.mil/airforcecontracting/knowledge_center/Pages/5315-main.aspx#MP), paragraph 6.3.2). Some SSAs may prefer to write the SSDD themselves, particularly if the CO is the SSA. In any case, assistance from source selection experts[[2]](#footnote-2) and legal is highly recommended.

**E. Who reviews and who signs it?** [AFFARS 5301.602-2(c)(4)(iii)](http://farsite.hill.af.mil/reghtml/regs/far2afmcfars/af_afmc/affars/5315.htm) requires legal review of source selection decisions and supporting documentation for full tradeoff acquisitions. . Although acquisitions using LPTA or PPT procedures are only required to have a legal review over $500,000 (Operational and SMC) and over $1,000,000 (AFMC Non-Operational), it is nonetheless a good practice to request a review even when it is not required. Legal counsel should review the SSDD for “legal sufficiency” as well as other guidance they wish to impart. In addition to legal review, source selection experts should review the SSDD prior to SSA signature. When a SSAC is used, the SSA may request that the SSAC Chair review the SSDD. Since the SSDD is the SSA’s integrated assessment, the SSA must sign the SSDD and direct award to be made by the CO. If the CO is the SSA, the CO should sign the SSDD as the SSA rather than as the CO.

Note: Regulatory threshold requirements may have changed; it is a good practice to review regulations for current thresholds.

**F. Who receives a copy of the SSDD?** The SSDD, appropriately redacted, must be provided to all debriefed offerors ([MP5315.506(a)(3)](http://farsite.hill.af.mil/reghtml/regs/far2afmcfars/af_afmc/affars/MP5315.5.htm)). Redacting the SSDD means removing proprietary and source selection information (see [FAR 3.104](http://farsite.hill.af.mil/reghtml/regs/far2afmcfars/fardfars/far/03.htm)). In determining what constitutes a redacted SSDD, see [FAR 2.101](http://farsite.hill.af.mil/reghtml/regs/far2afmcfars/fardfars/far/02.htm) for a definition of source selection information. The redacted SSDD is releasable under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Also, the unredacted SSDD is fully releasable to the GAO and others authorized to receive proprietary and source selection information ([MP5315.3](https://cs.eis.af.mil/airforcecontracting/knowledge_center/Pages/5315-main.aspx#MP), paragraph 7.12.1).

**G. How does the SSDD differ for LPTA, PPT, and Full Trade off?** The SSDD’s intent is the same for LPTA, PPT, and Full Tradeoff source selections; however, there are differences in the factors and the focus of the comparisons. While the Mission Capability evaluation must be discussed in all SSDDs where a technical proposal is required, for LPTA and PPT source selections there is no comparative analysis of Mission Capability Factor or Subfactor(s) since the evaluation of these factor/subfactor(s) is a pass/fail assessment. Also, the “Cost/Price” factor is usually just “Price” under LPTA and PPT. For PPT source selections, the tradeoff discussion focuses on the past performance confidence assessment against price.

**III. SSDD Objectives**

* Document the decision rationale and provide insight into the SSA’s integrated assessment and resultant decision.
* Explain why the selected offeror’s proposal(s) was (were) determined to provide best value.
* Illustrate the SSA’s thought process in making the integrated assessment.
* Demonstrate how the comparative analysis resulted in the award decision and explain why the selected offeror(s) should receive the contract award(s).
* On occasion, the SSA may draw a conclusion regarding a specific rating that is different from the award recommendation(s) provided by the SSET or SSAC, when used. When this occurs, it is especially important to explain the SSA’s basis for his or her different conclusion on the rating.
* Provide the offerors meaningful feedback in order for them to fully understand their ratings in relationship to the selected offeror(s) and improve their competitiveness in future source selections.

**IV.**  **SSDD Contents (in order of appearance)**

Note: Information/directorial/placeholders printed in ref parenthetical italics should not be left within the SSDD.

1.0 Referencing phrase *(“Pursuant to AFFARS 5315, the SSP, and etc.”)*

2.0 Award decision rationale statement

3.0 Mission, scope, contract approach, offerors

4.0 Evaluation method

*(List the factors consistent with RFP Section M and include their importance compared to cost/price; explain rating method(s) used - colors, adjectival, weights, and/or ordinal rankings)*

5.0 The Mission Capability factor and its subfactors, when subfactors are established

*(Subfactors listed in descending order of importance)*

6.0 The Mission Capability factor’s subfactor technical rating comparative analysis

*(The analysis is not comparative for LPTA and PPT acquisitions because the technical evaluation is not part of the tradeoff)*

7.0 Mission Capability factor’s subfactor risk rating comparative analysis *(The analysis is not comparative for LPTA and PPT acquisitions because the technical evaluation is not part of the tradeoff)*

8.0 Comparative analysis of the performance confidence assessment at the factor level *(The analysis is not comparative, if used, for LPTA acquisitions because the past performance evaluation is not part of the tradeoff)*

9.0 Cost/Price Risk factor *(if applicable)*

10.0 Cost/Price factor

*(Except that this is usually just termed “Price” on LPTA and PPT acquisitions)*

11.0 Recommendation(s) from the SSET or SSAC

*(Include rationale for any disagreement with the recommendation(s))*

12.0 Summary determination

13.0 SSA signature block and date of decision

**V. Suggested Dos and DON’Ts**

**A. DOs**. Re-read Section M of the RFP and then the evaluation documentation, including contents of briefings.

Write the SSDD for four audiences: the GAO, the U.S. Court of Federal Claims, the offerors, and the media. Do not expect that these audiences will ever have to read it but ensure that the SSDD is written in a manner that would allow them to understand it (not necessarily agree with it) if it happened to be read by any one of the four audiences.



State the evaluation factors, their subfactors, and elements if used, and their relative importance and ensure consistency with Section M.



State the relative importance to cost/price of all other factors when combined. Ensure this is consistent with Section M.



For each mission capability subfactor technical rating, identify each offeror’s strengths, uncertainties and deficiencies within the proposal and then explain how the strengths, uncertainties and deficiencies resulted in the final rating, using the definitions of those ratings contained in [MP5315.3](https://cs.eis.af.mil/airforcecontracting/knowledge_center/Pages/5315-main.aspx#MP), section 5.5.1.1, Table 1. (If there were uncertainties and deficiencies that were resolved during discussions there is no need to discuss those in the SSDD.)



For each mission capability subfactor risk rating, identify the weaknesses and significant weaknesses of the approach, if any. (If there were weaknesses and/or significant weaknesses that were resolved during discussions there is no need to discuss those in the SSDD.)



Adequately address the impact of past performance and its relative order of importance with respect to all of the evaluation criteria. Ensure this is consistent with Section M.



In teaming arrangements, such as mentor-protégé, joint venture, or subcontractors, consider the partner’s relevant past performance only to the degree they will play in performance of the contract.



* Discuss the cost/price evaluation. Explain how the price(s) were determined fair and reasonable, costs were determined realistic, or Probable Costs developed, as applicable. Use comparative language about which offeror was X% more/less than the others.
* For programs requiring a most probable cost/price evaluation, discuss the cost/price risk evaluation.
* Discuss those discriminators that make one offeror better than another. Be

as detailed and focused upon discriminators as the source selection results allow. If something was not a discriminator then say so and also state why it was not.

* In a “best value” evaluation process, be sure to explicitly state in the SSDD

that a proposal with a higher evaluated cost/price was not worth the additional cost/price if the SSA is selecting a proposal with a lower evaluated cost and lower mission capability technical rating or past performance rating.

Explain in sufficient detail why the perceived benefits of a higher priced proposal offer the best value. Explain, with supporting evidence, what is worth the additional money.



Show the SSA’s thought process and reasons behind the comparative analysis. Include declaration of thinking/intent on the part of the SSA. For example: I selected; I thought; I determined; I reviewed; etc.



Spend some time on the summary to make it correct as it is very important. In order to assure that the SSDD is correct, it must “track” with the contents of the Proposal Analysis Report (PAR) if the SSA agrees with the conclusions of the SSET. It is meant to very quickly put in words the best of the key discriminators used by the SSA to reach their decision.



Have source selection experts’ review and provide assistance/advice on the SSDD.



Have legal counsel review and provide assistance/advice on the SSDD (per [AFFARS 5301.602-2](http://farsite.hill.af.mil/reghtml/regs/far2afmcfars/af_afmc/affars/5301.htm)).



**B. DON’Ts**. Don’t cut and paste from another SSDD[[3]](#footnote-3). All SSDDs are unique because all acquisitions and all RFPs are different. It is good to understand what a good SSDD looks like but it is bad to “fill in the blanks” from a previous one that you happen to have, or that is attached to this Guide. No SSA or CO would enjoy making a statement in an official record like the one in the referenced GAO case.

Don’t quantify by assigning numerical scores to the evaluation factor ratings. The rating definitions in [MP5315.3](https://cs.eis.af.mil/airforcecontracting/knowledge_center/Pages/5315-main.aspx#MP) are qualitative and subjective, not numerical.



Don’t focus the discussion on only one offeror. The SSDD compares assessments of the successful offeror against the others. Even if there are a large number of offerors, the SSDD must make an assessment of the relative standing of the offerors based upon an application of the relative order of importance of the evaluation criteria in order to reduce the field of potential protests.



Don’t confuse mission capability technical rating (color/adjectival) with mission capability risk rating. While color/adjectival rating focuses on the strengths, uncertainties and deficiencies of the proposed approach submitted in response to the requirement (exceeded, met, or did not meet), mission capability risk rating relates to the weaknesses of the proposed approach (negative impacts to schedule, cost, or performance).



Don’t use color or adjectival ratings that are inconsistent with the terms used in the standard definitions for those terms in [MP5315.3](https://cs.eis.af.mil/airforcecontracting/knowledge_center/Pages/5315-main.aspx#MP). (i.e. color or adjectival ratings with contradicting supporting language, such as a GREEN or BLUE that is “clearly superior”. The strength or strengths assigned to a GREEN or BLUE along with the magnitude of the benefit to the Air Force will establish superior aspects.)



Don’t identify or list weaknesses or a significant weakness without discussing them and their importance to the thought process.



Don’t roll up subfactor ratings into an overall factor rating, (per [MP5315.3](https://cs.eis.af.mil/airforcecontracting/knowledge_center/Pages/5315-main.aspx#MP), paragraphs 5.5.1 and 5.5.2) except for the performance confidence assessment. If subfactors are used, color ratings and risk ratings remain at the subfactor level only.



Don’t treat an unknown performance confidence assessment favorably or unfavorably. (Don’t disqualify an offeror for having an unknown confidence rating.) However, in a comparative assessment and if stated in the Evaluation Factors for Award (Section M) greater consideration may be given to those offerors who have more positive and recent/relevant past performance.



**VI. Checklist for a Complete and Accurate SSDD**

* Is the SSDD written as a stand-alone document without any references to other reports and analyses used to support the SSA’s decision? All data supporting the decision should be contained within the SSDD.
* Does the SSDD tell a complete story and is it clear and concise? Do paragraphs flow logically?
* Are all of the factors and subfactors impacting the decision process identified in the SSDD and are they identical to the RFP? Are those subfactors that did not impact the decision acknowledged? (For example, “negligible differences among the offerors” or “the offerors have no notable strengths or weaknesses” or “this did not impact my decision.”)
* Do the conclusions for each evaluation factor and award decision link directly to the evaluation factors in the RFP?
* Does the SSDD compare offerors against each other (for example, “I have decided [Offeror ABC’s] approach to the subcontracting plan subfactor was better than [Offeror XYZ’s or all other offerors] because [Offeror ABC] proposed / discussed / resolved / identified / possessed . . .”?)
* If the situation is applicable, does the rationale explain why and how the additional benefits and advantages justify a best value award to someone other than the lowest priced offeror?
* Does this explanation demonstrate a reasonable, certain, and non-arbitrary rationale?
* If the SSA disagreed with the evaluation team recommendations, does the SSDD explain why?
* Is the SSDD fully traceable to the evaluation briefing charts and Proposal Analysis Report (PAR), if used? There must be total consistency between the RFP, the evaluation, the PAR and the SSDD or a full explanation of any inconsistency.
* Does the SSDD clearly state that the SSA followed the stated relative order of importance of the evaluation criteria and was it interwoven in the comparative analysis discussion in the SSDD? There must be an up-front statement of the relative order of importance of the evaluation criteria In the SSDD.
* Did source selection experts, as applicable, and legal counsel review the SSDD?

**VII. Administrative**

* Write in past tense only.
* Write in first person only.
* Do not make the document look fancy. Do not use or minimally use graphics.
* Do not use attachments.
* Font = Times or Arial; Size = 12(suggested). One inch margins all around. Justified margins or regular margins are fine, but do not mix.
* Spell out acronyms at first use. This one is important to ensure a common understanding of the key items in the source selection. Do not assume that the reader knows what you are talking about technically or administratively. If necessary, put in a very short explanation of the term especially if it is a key discriminator.
* Check your numbers, percentages, math, etc. at least twice yourself and then have a third party check them one more time. Attention to detail (getting the small stuff correct the first time) is important because it instills confidence in the quality of the workmanship.
* Do not needlessly repeat items within the document except for the summary. Expect that readers can look forward or back for the referenced material.
* Put the ratings in all capital letters (BLUE) to make them standout. Put factors and subfactors (mission capability) in first letter capitals to make them standout as well.
* Add page breaks and use titles to set things off from each other. For example, it should be clear to the reader which factor or subfactor is being detailed.
* Be consistent throughout the document in format and treatment of the offerors and discussions.
* Go with the flow – recognize that each reviewer up the chain will recommend their own wording. Don’t let it frustrate you. Remember that ultimately the SSDD needs to say what the SSA thought/felt when he/she made the decision.

**VIII. Redacted SSDD Samples**

Samples of SSDDs for various types of source selections are referenced below. These samples illustrate how to address important elements in the decision document, but they DO NOT contain boilerplate wording that everyone should use. Since every acquisition is different, every SSDD should be different. The SSDD must reflect your SSA’s thought process and his/her preferences on the level of detail. AFAC 2004-0721 and AFAC 2008-0128 revised source selection terminology and added additional features. Those changes are NOT reflected in the attached samples. These SSDDs were all written prior to AFAC 2004-0721 and AFAC 2008-0128, another reason to not copy their language.

A. [Full Tradeoff acquisition, over $100M](https://cs.eis.af.mil/airforcecontracting/knowledge_center/Documents/AFFARS_Library/5315/SSDD_Samples/Sample_A.pdf)

B. [Full Tradeoff acquisition, over $100M](https://cs.eis.af.mil/airforcecontracting/knowledge_center/Documents/AFFARS_Library/5315/SSDD_Samples/Sample_B.pdf)

C. [Full Tradeoff acquisition with multiple awards, over $100M](https://cs.eis.af.mil/airforcecontracting/knowledge_center/Documents/AFFARS_Library/5315/SSDD_Samples/Sample_C.pdf)

D. [Full Tradeoff acquisition, over $100M](https://cs.eis.af.mil/airforcecontracting/knowledge_center/Documents/AFFARS_Library/5315/SSDD_Samples/Sample_D.pdf)

E. [Full Tradeoff acquisition, between $10M and $100M](https://cs.eis.af.mil/airforcecontracting/knowledge_center/Documents/AFFARS_Library/5315/SSDD_Samples/Sample_E.pdf)

F. [Performance Price Tradeoff, with technical proposal, between $10M and $100M](https://cs.eis.af.mil/airforcecontracting/knowledge_center/Documents/AFFARS_Library/5315/SSDD_Samples/Sample_F.pdf)

G. [Performance Price Tradeoff, no technical proposal, under $10M](https://cs.eis.af.mil/airforcecontracting/knowledge_center/Documents/AFFARS_Library/5315/SSDD_Samples/Sample_G.pdf)

You can also [go directly to the webpage](https://cs.eis.af.mil/airforcecontracting/knowledge_center/Documents/AFFARS_Library/5315/SSDD_Samples/) to access the samples above.

**NOTE:** If the links above don’t work, copy the link and paste it into the address bar of your web browser. To copy the link, right-click on the link and select “Copy Hyperlink” from the pop-up menu.

1. See Tiger Enterprises, Inc., B-293951, July 26, 2004 where the GAO sustained a protest because the “Agency’s evaluation of quotations and selection of the awardees quotation for award cannot be determined reasonable where the evaluation and source selection are not supported by the record.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Source selection experts may refer to ACE advisors, contract reviewers, individuals participating as chair, members, or advisors of a source selection organization as well as other subject matter experts that are beneficial to a specific action, activity, or decision in question. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Team BOS/Naples—Gemmo S.p.A./DelJen, B-298865.3, December 28, 2007 where the GAO denied the protest; however, the CO admitted erroneous references in the Source Selection Authority Decision resulted from cut and paste from a sample SSAD. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)