

Secrets of a Proposal Pro **How Small Business Can Win BIG with Effective Government Proposals**

The US Government is the largest purchaser of goods and services in the world -- in good times and bad. In times of recession, when the private sector retrenches, Government has traditionally increased its spending to support economic recovery.

But you just can't sell to Government the way that you can in the private sector. Because it uses public funds, the Government has to have a system that provides accountability, transparency and the clear ability to objectively compare "apples to apples" – and to explain why it chose your apple in particular.

The RFP Process

Which brings us to the Request for Proposal (RFP) process. The RFP is the Government's request for services that meet certain specifications and requirements. In turn, companies interested in selling these services to Government provide a response, known as a proposal.

A proposal is your written plan to provide services to a potential client. It describes how your product or service will benefit their agency; explains step-by-step how your company will provide this service; and specifies what this will cost. It



sells your company's unique advantages and makes a strong case for hiring you – and not your competitor.

Written effectively, your organization's proposal can convince the Government buyer that you're right for the contract well before the last page is turned.

Sounds great - but how do you get started?

Where Do I Find These RFPs?

The fastest, cheapest and most up-to-date source for Government contracting opportunities is the Internet. Not only do individual agencies list notices of their pending proposals, but most allow you to download and print out the entire Request for Proposal (RFP) directly from their web site.

For RFPs released by Federal agencies, check the Federal Business Opportunities website, www.fbo.gov. This website allows you to search by varied criteria – at no charge. Listings are updated daily.



If you want to learn about Government contracting opportunities in your state, start with USAGov: http://www.usa.gov/Agencies/State_and_Territories.shtml. The site will link you to the official homepage for your state. Search there for “procurement,” “doing business with,” or “contracting opportunities” on these pages.

In the New York metropolitan area, the most comprehensive sources for Government contracting information are **The City Record**, which publishes daily listings of RFPs for New York City agencies, and **The New York State Contract Reporter**,

which provides weekly listings for New York State agencies. You can find them at:

New York City Record

<http://a856-internet.nyc.gov/nycvendoronline/VendorShort/asp/VendorMenu.asp>

New York State Contract Reporter

<http://www.nyscr.org/>

Additionally, the **25 Best RFP Links** are available FREE on the Proposal Pro web site at:

<http://www.proposalpro.com/sites.html>

What are They Saying?

It's hard to speak to your audience when you have no idea what language they're speaking. Government truly speaks a language all its own. It may *look like* English, but often the terms used in RFPs have very specific meanings.



Capabilities. The amount and type of work your organization can perform today using existing resources; also, how much additional work you can add using those same resources – staff, equipment, office space, etc.

Conclusions. A summary of all your strategic selling points that tells why the potential client needs your product or service.

Implementation. Your plan to accomplish the work you are proposing to do, including what resources you will need from your potential client to carry out this plan.

Methodology. Your philosophy, procedures and rules for implementing your plan. Why you do what you do and how you measure and/or control its effectiveness.

Procurement. The process of obtaining services, supplies and equipment according to defined laws and regulations.

Responsiveness. A subjective qualification that includes whether you meet stated requirements for size, years in service or experience, but also whether you answer the RFP questions.

Scope of Services. The specific tasks to be required of a vendor as outlined in the RFP, which also will be written into a contract if your organization is selected.

Transmittal Letter. An outline of all important information evaluators need to know: The RFP number, your company's official contact person, and other relevant information as may be requested.

Are You Proposal-Ready?

Did you file your taxes? Well, much like that process, the proposal process requires you to have your basic paperwork in order. The only advantage is that if you're successful in the RFP process, the Government pays *you*.

Here's a quick checklist of items you'll want to have identified and handy before you write your next proposal. For further explanation of these terms and connections to related resources, visit:

<http://www.proposalpro.com/resources.aspx>

Organizational Information

- Federal Tax ID Number (TIN):
- Duns and Bradstreet Number (DUNS):
- NAICS Code:
- SIC Code:
- Have you completed the Central Contractor Registration?
- CAGE:
- Banking Information (as listed in CCR):
- MWBE Status / Certifying Agency / Date:
- Incorporation Information: Organization, Date Filed, State Filed:
- Have you been in business for two years or more?

Experience and Qualifications Narrative

- Company History / Highlights
- Organizational Chart
- Key Resumes



- Programs / Services / Lines of Business
- Awards / Honors / Recognitions

Past Performance

- Clients, with full contact information
- Contract / project details with dollar value

Attachments

- Audited Financial Statements, past 2 years
- Incorporation Papers and Filing Receipts
- Proof of Insurance and / or Bonding

Secrets to High-Scoring Proposals

To win a Government proposal, you have to achieve the highest possible score in the evaluation process. It goes without saying that your failure to follow the Government's instructions as printed in the RFP can earn you a zero score. In fact, it may land your proposal in the "non-responsive" pile (we laypersons call that the trash). On the other hand, following the Government's instructions and following these **Quick Tips for Effective Proposal Writing** will greatly improve your scores and chances of winning:

Read the Proposal. The single largest complaint made by Government procurement officers is that vendors do not read the proposal – and, thus, do not answer their questions. If agency staff took the time to write it, it is their expectation that anyone who wants to do business with them will read it. Start at the beginning. Read everything, including attachments and forms. Understand what the agency wants to buy, not just what you want to sell. And remember, if you win, all those pages that you didn't read will end up in your contract and you'll be bound to comply with them. It is always better to make sure you agree with the terms before you submit your proposal.

Follow the Format. If the RFP requires specific wording on the label or a certain order to the response, do EXACTLY that. If you do not, you could be disqualified. If you do, you make it easier for evaluators

to find the information they're looking for, which gives you an advantage. Remember, you are not just being evaluated on what you write, but also on how you approach the process. Evaluators are looking for companies with which they can work successfully. If you don't follow their instructions during the proposal process – when you should be most eager to meet their needs and win their business – why would they think you'd be more accommodating after a contract is signed?

Prepare for the Opportunity. Don't rely on the RFP as your sole source of information. Research the agency – even before the RFP is released, if possible – and get to know their processes, their needs and their preferences. Read other RFPs they've released. Know who you are competing against and what they are likely to offer. Attend pre-bid meetings and learn who is on the evaluation team, if possible. The more information you have, the better you can customize your response to meet the agency's specific needs.

Speak to Your Audience. Who is looking at the proposal? Finance people who will focus on the budget? Operations people who want to know how your implementation plan will mesh with their current procedures? Diversity personnel? Technical staff? Address the potential concerns of each evaluator in the language and the format they are most likely to understand and relate to.

The Final Word

Knowing what you're doing really makes a difference. Proposal Pro, Inc. has helped organizations to win more than \$400 million in Government grants and contracts since 1995.

We write hundreds of proposals every year, and know what Government is asking for even if they don't explicitly say it. We know what forms they need even if they forget to include them in the RFP. And because we've won so many proposals, we know how to "read between the lines" of the RFP, extract the true, sometimes hidden, key elements and then help you respond with a winning proposal.

We regularly increase our clients' evaluation score by 15 points or more over what they could have done on their own. Can we help you? Please visit our website at www.proposalpro.com for details, or call us at 914-633-3352.



Proposal Pro, Inc. offers free 10-minute consultations. Call 914-633-3353, or email to info@proposalpro.com