

True Story

(Winning by submitting a compelling presentation of the required information vs. losing by submitting relevant but unwanted information)

TRUE STORY

A Department Head had overseen a comprehensive and lengthy effort to submit a proposal that was ultimately rejected. It was a very thorough proposal and clearly told the story of his organizations' history and outstanding achievements. Both dejected and curious, he attended a debriefing meeting to find out why his proposal was not selected. Among the reasons provided by the Government Contracting Officer was the fact that the proposal included considerably more information than had been required in the Request for Proposal (RFP). Filtering through the extraneous content to find the stated requirements had made proposal evaluation difficult for the Source Selection Evaluation Board (SSEB), and the proposal ended up being downgraded as unresponsive.

The Department Head faulted this logic, arguing that his team had supplied exactly the right amount of information needed to provide the government with the necessary data to make the most informed decision possible. He argued that the Government did not understand what was required for a thorough proposal and the RFP was at fault because it left out significant points.

WHO IS RIGHT?

This story illustrates two valid, but competing, points of view. The Department Head believes he knows what information is needed to make a professional proposal. The Government Official believes she knows what information is needed to select an appropriate contractor.

The point of view that will ultimately prevail is the one that follows the golden rule -- the party with the gold rules. In the world of competitive government procurements, that party clearly is the Government. A vendor who thinks the Government doesn't know

what it's doing, and acts on that belief, does so at its own peril.

Looking at this from the government's side, at least three of the reasons for rejection are clear:

- **PROTEST MITIGATION**
- **PERFORMANCE RISK**
- **UNIQUE FEATURES**

Looking at each of these three from the viewpoint of the Contracting Officer and the SSEB makes it clear that this rejection was not a matter of personal judgment but rather a mandatory requirement of the procurement process.

Protest Mitigation

Section L outlines the precise information the government requires to evaluate and select a winning proposal. Section M of the RFP delineates the selection criteria and outlines the process by which the government will evaluate the proposals and select a winner. If the government deviates or does not comply with this process, a basis for a successful protest will be established. Successful protests hurt the Contracting Officer's performance record and have a negative impact on program cost and scheduling. Therefore, selecting a proposal that does not rigorously and precisely comply with Sections L and M creates a significant protest risk for the Government and as such these proposals are, most often, rejected.

Performance Risk

In addition to selection criteria, the RFP contains detailed instructions for proposal content and organization. For example, Section L mandates the order and location of specific information. Any deviation from this shows an offeror's failure to follow directions. Some, if not all, of the members



ClientView Conversations

of the SSEB are usually managers from the Government’s Program Team who have significant levels of responsibility for program success. They are very likely to view an offeror who does not follow RFP directions as a contractor who will not follow directions when under contract. Such contractors present themselves as a high performance risk for the Government who will not, by definition, perform the contract satisfactorily.

Unique Features

Only RFP Section M is intended to elicit information regarding unique features in an offeror’s proposal. Unique features, commonly called discriminators, can be a major factor in the selection of a proposal for contract award only if they are clearly and intimately linked to one or more evaluation factors. It is these features that guide the government toward the Best Value proposal in terms of price, schedule, performance, or other components. Unique features that are not relevant to the Evaluation Factors or are buried in text presenting in non-responsive or not-required information are most likely to be viewed as irrelevant. Further, awarding a contract based on unique features that are not clearly relevant to the evaluation factors creates a significant protest risk for the Government.

CREATING WINNING PROPOSALS

From the government’s point of view, two key elements dictate the approach to creating winning proposals.

Outline

Adhere to the instructions in Section L regarding the content, nature, definition, organization and sequence of specific information. Be certain that your proposal responds thoroughly and in-depth, with unique features, to every evaluation factor in Section M.

Information

Present the Government the specific information requested. Elaborate sales pitches, eye-candy graphics, platitudes, and story-of-the-company filler are neither asked for nor wanted.

A winning proposal must therefore present the specific information required in the exact organizational structure required AND address the key elements considered important by the government. The first step is to create an outline that follows the proposal organization required by Section L and contains the specific information required by Section M. This may seem like a simple chore however, depending upon the complexity of the RFP, a seasoned proposal manager may need anywhere from 4 to 40 hours and 3 to 50 pages just to complete the proposal outline.

The next most critical step in creating a winning proposal is to obtain, compile, and assemble the information. This may sound simple enough, but for many firms, this straight-forward task is enormously difficult because the information required is not readily available in the company’s records or the managers’ memories. To make this task simpler and more efficient, and to make the results more effective, let’s look at what we mean by “information.”

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AS A BUSINESS PROCEDURE

Clearly, the amount and variety of information needed is daunting. Moreover, there isn’t a lot of time to assemble it. The time between the RFP release date and the proposal due date is often as little as 30 days. . After deducting the time for the start-up process and the final edit, print, and submit processes, only 20 days may be left in which to produce the proposal. Exhausting this limited amount of time by retrieving, compiling, and assembling the RFP required information, may, at best, produce an acceptable third place effort--but not a winner.

The solution is obvious and, when fully implemented, will immediately elevate the quality of your proposals and increase your win rate. Define the information you typically need for your proposals and collect it in advance as a normal function of your business operations.

Virtually all firms have good accounting practices. Many have good human resource compliance management. But very few have orderly business



EXAMPLES of TYPICAL TYPES OF INFORMATION REQUIRED FOR PROPOSALS

Articles	Statistics	Awards & Public Recognition
Comparisons	Examples of Savings (\$ & Time)	Master Plans & Schedules
Facts & Figures	Compliance Checklists	Performance Audits,
Data & Assessments	Earnings Reports & Financial Statements	Drawings
Diagrams	Photos & Videos	Letters of Commendation/ Testimonials
Number of Relevant Contracts	Number of Qualified Personnel	Product/Service Demonstrations
Contract Data & Descriptions	Charts/Graphs	Associations
Quotes & Books	Client Lists	Expertise
Tests	Standards Lists	Endorsements
Organizations Charts	Test/Lab Results	Certifications
Quality Assurance Plan	Technical, Construction or Manufacturing Drawings	Process & Flow Diagrams
Anecdotes & Problem Solving Stories	Resumes & Professional Qualifications	

systems for collecting, organizing, saving, and using the key performance information that is so vital to business development and revenue growth. The few firms that do have these systems in place are also the few that consistently win the most new contracts.

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