



The Strange, Strange World of Proposal Writing

Understanding the nuances of federal proposals is analogous to understanding a new language and culture. The world of writing federal proposals can only be fathomed by living in that world for a number of years. Even experienced federal contractors underestimate the amount of time and skill required to produce a compliant and competitive federal proposal. Inexperienced federal contractors or companies outside the market don't even have a clue.

What are some of the factors that make the realm of writing federal proposals so strange? To start, federal Requests for Proposals (RFPs) are poorly drafted, fraught with errors and omissions, confusing and maddening. The key to success is to understand the two most critical components or concepts: content and price.

Once you have landed in this strange new world, how do you learn to write proposals?

You learn by writing proposals - sometimes failing - writing some more and by processing and learning from federal customer's feedback. It is also critical to have the support of corporate management who should put an emphasis on getting the job done rather than putting such tasks on the back burner.

The major steps in writing a compelling and effective federal proposal are as follows:

1. Your staff must deconstruct the RFP, sentence by sentence and clause by clause, to build a complete proposal template (outline), which addresses every meaningful term and proposal requirement. Throw away the RFP. Do the same with every amendment and update the template.
2. Move (i) existing corporate experience descriptions, resumes, technical and management plan content from old proposals, and (ii) files of model content and solutions to your new proposal file.
3. Flag the holes in the content template that need filling and pass the task on to the technical writers with instructions to gather required information and data and to draft new content that fills the holes. Start praying.
4. Assign deadlines to the technical writers and then beg management to enforce the deadlines (and pray some more). Reassign content when the results are poor.
5. Pull it together, conduct reviews, edit and publish.

What is the most critical step? Number 1, by far. Without an outline, confusion and chaos will reign. And worse yet, you may find yourself with a proposal that doesn't meet the RFPs specifications or without a finished product. The next most crucial step is Number 4. Many managers find proposal writing distasteful and will hide rather than wield the stick that it takes to get compelling content from technical writers.

If you have any questions about this article or would like more information on this topic please contact us at (888) 661 – 4094, Ext.2. Or call the author of this article, Richard White, directly at (301) 908 – 0546, or at rwhite@fedmarket.com.