10 Secrets to Writing Winning Proposals

By Richard White

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Writing winning federal proposals requires a rigid, structured business process to ensure (1) proposal compliance and (2) content that provides precisely what the government wants. Here's why: *The federal government has all the cards in the federal contracting game.* Agencies present precisely what they want in an RFP, even though you may believe it isn't what they need or should have.

RFPs present what the government wants; presenting anything different usually results in a losing proposal. Not providing every requirement down to the minutest of details allows the government to reject your proposal and speed up their evaluation process.

Richard White, a successful federal contractor and business owner, has spent over 35 years in the federal market and knows all about RFPs and writing compliant proposals so that you can compete in the competitive federal contracting world.

RFPs state how they want the proposal organized, what sections they want, and what they want you to write in each "scorable" section. Anything beyond what they want – e.g., self-serving statements, unsubstantiated claims, and more sophisticated solutions than requested – results in "down scoring."

If you have tried and failed with proposal writing, the **10 secrets** revealed in this book will guide you in the process of writing winning proposals, which include:
- The importance of deconstructing the RFP
- How to organize your proposal
- How to create Win Themes
- How to build a Proposal Library to save time and effort.

By following the **10 secrets**, you will learn the art and the science of proposal writing and maximize your chances of selling your products and services to the federal government and beyond.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard White founded Fedmarket in 1996 to assist small businesses in doing business with the federal government. Before Fedmarket, he built a federal services company from his garage to $150 million in revenue over 15 years.

Mr. White won his first IT/consulting contract at a federal biomedical research facility and used that one to win all of the contracts at the facility. From there, he grew his business by going after and winning contacts at other federal laboratories.

This experience forms the basis of this book and provides a path for any small business interested in successfully selling its services and products to the federal government.

SECRET #1 – USE A PROPOSAL WRITING SYSTEM OR PERISH

Crafting a well-written and compelling proposal is a complex and challenging task. The process requires attention to detail and the writer must understand what the proposal evaluators will be looking for when reviewing the proposal. Creativity is required when writing the Technical Approach and the Management Plan (although some might not consider writing technical and management solutions creative).

Learning how to write winning proposals is like learning to ride a two-wheeler. Reading an instructional book might point you in the right direction and help you manage the process, but you must actually write proposals to really learn the nuances required to write winners."

Secret #1 – *Winning proposals are difficult to write, and you must have an exceptionally demanding process to write them*.

It's your call. Without having a structure in place, your company is likely to produce sloppy efforts. Forget to tailor a resume to the requirements of the Request for Proposal (RFP); lose a few points. Miss a nuance in the Management Plan; lose a few more points. A few points here, a few points there, and it's all over. **There aren't any shortcuts**.

Companies new to the federal market often miss the point that one or more of the companies writing competing proposals have the demanding business process in place to write outstanding proposals. And they probably have an experienced proposal manager and experienced proposal writers – a deadly combination. Proposal writing software cannot write a proposal for you any more than software could write that novel you have had in the back of your mind for years.

Companies that hope to win federal business must have a structured process in place or they will be left behind. You cannot afford to be without one if you are serious about selling services in the federal market.

Fedmarket uses a structured RFP-driven proposal process that ensures proposal compliance and assists in writing a clear and concise proposal. Basing your system on carefully deconstructing the RFP and organizing the proposal based on Section L is the core of any structured system. We win a majority of the proposals we write because of the proposal structured system we use.

>Yet some of the proposals we write lose.
>**Why?**

Because the customer was stretching its capabilities and experience and maybe proposed a losing price. And, sometimes, the customer simply wanted to work (once

again) with the company they know and love. But without RFP compliance, you won't even have a chance of winning.

Effective writing requires clarity of presentation. If there is any *one* thing a proposal evaluator wants, it's clarity. You can't have clarity without a logical presentation. The best way to create a logical presentation is to use a proposal outline that follows the requirements outlined in the RFP.

To paraphrase Bill Clinton: "It's the outline stupid." A structured writing system at its core is an outline generator.

Fedmarket's system works, and, if your win rate is high, your system works. But you have to have a system.

SECRET #2 – DECONSTRUCTING THE RFP ENSURES COMPLIANCE

Secret #2 – *The first step in an effective proposal writing system (business process) is deconstructing the RFP sentence-by-sentence into a proposal outline.*

Deconstructing the RFP into an outline:
- Ensures proposal compliance. (Evaluators thrive on compliance errors because it makes the "no" pile grow more quickly).
- Structures the proposal the way they want and expect based on the RFP.

Deconstructing the RFP and developing a proposal outline is a detailed and precise exercise. The exercise is hard, but it gets harder yet. The outline provides the foundation for the proposal, but filling in the gaps is the tough part. What's left after building the outline are small and large gaps (needed content) that only technical writers and contract managers can fill.

An example of a small gap might be updating the project description for a past or current contract. A large gap might be the need for a database structure for the proposed solution. The action is in the gap content—that's usually where you win or lose.

In most cases, filling in small and large gaps is like pulling teeth. Moreover, sometimes the smallest of holes can create last-minute crises in getting the proposal out the door.

Why does this happen over and over?

The primary reasons are lack of attention and focus from the top. CEOs, EVPs, and VPs tend to put proposal writing in the same class as having a root canal. Just let it slide, and somehow it will get done. Proposal Managers need to summarize their problems for management, and management needs to act early to ride the professional staff so they fill in the gaps on schedule.

What is the most critical step?

The outline, by far. Without an outline, confusion and chaos will reign. Worse yet, you may find yourself with a proposal that doesn't meet the RFP's specifications or, worse yet, an incomplete proposal. The next most crucial step is the writing. Many corporate managers find proposal writing distasteful and will hide rather than wield the stick that it takes to get compelling content from technical writers.

SECRET #3 – ORGANIZE THE PROPOSAL AS DICTATED BY THE RFP

CEOs frequently say, "This RFP is not well organized. Let's organize it logically and impress them with our writing skills."

Evaluators *like* their RFPs regardless of how well you think they are organized.

Secret #3 – *Organize your proposal as it is dictated by the RFP*.

If you don't provide the sections requested in Section L, and *only* those sections, you may as well throw your proposal in the trash. The evaluators reviewing your proposal probably wrote Section L. To ignore their organization is the kiss of death.

Evaluators may be reading your proposal at 10 pm after their kid's soccer game. Try to put yourself in their shoes. Their major objective in life is to get through and score a pile of proposals as quickly as possible.

They probably wish they weren't on the evaluation committee and were watching *Game of Thrones* instead of staring at a pile of proposals.

Do everything in your power to make their job easier. Remember: scoring text is a subjective exercise like grading a term paper.

It boils down to this: make it easy on the evaluator. Keep it concise and to the point. Don't give them more than they asked for in the RFP. Cut out the puffery. Show the customer you understand their problem and present a practical, risk-free solution laden with insights and benefits.

SECRET #4 – PROVIDE EXACTLY WHAT'S REQUESTED IN THE RFP

Section L of the RFP tells you exactly what the evaluators want in your proposal.

Secret #4 – *DO NOT*:
- *Provide more than the RFP asks for*
- *Provide less than the RFP asks for*
- *Organize your proposal differently than requested in the RFP*
- *Try to fill in text to reach page limits*
- *Present self-serving statements that are not substantiated*.

CEOs frequently like to overdo RFP content requirements.

If they ask for three corporate experience summaries, give them the three experiences that best fit the RFP Scope of Work, not six summaries to impress the evaluators. It will have the opposite impact.

If they ask for one resume for your proposed key person give them one. The one with the experience that best fits the RFP Scope of Work.

Providing only what's requested in Section L ensures that your content will be scored. Don't throw in sections *not* requested in Section L, like executive summaries, flowery "we are pleased to submit" letters, and alternate approaches. These things irritate evaluators.

> The facts—*just the facts*—win.

SECRET #5 – MAKE YOUR PROPOSAL WIN THEMES REAL

A "Win Theme" is an overused and somewhat ambiguous phrase. In essence, it means: "what can we say that will result in a maximum proposal evaluation score?" In this book, we use the term *Executive Summary* to mean a summary of selling points or themes that will result in a win.

Executive Summaries are usually not required in Federal RFPs and throwing one into your proposal usually doesn't hurt—but sometimes it irritates proposal evaluators. Our recommendation is: don't throw it in unless they asked for it.

But, we suggest you write it anyway, and then break it up and distribute it throughout the scoreable sections of the proposal.

Write the Executive Summary on Day 1. List your experience with similar work, contract performance, solution ideas and management insights. Then, refine it and rewrite it as the proposal progresses.

Secret #5 – Bring out one or more of the win themes in each section (chapter) of the proposal. Win themes could include the following:
- Low price
- Best value
- Risk reduction or avoidance
- Customer solution that is unique, proven, and low cost
- Solution that is practical and can be implemented quickly and economically
- Solution benefits
- Exceptionally qualified project manager and/or senior technical staff
- Project Manager and/or senior technical staff that the customer knows and trusts
- Previous experience with the agency
- Exceptional experience matching the RFP requirements with proof of superior performance and references.

Weave one or more of these suggested themes into your executive summary and then add themes that are unique to your company. Some suggested themes may be sub-themes. Don't throw themes into your proposal that can't be proven as a benefit to the customer. Don't overdo win themes: prove it or eliminate it.

　　　　TIP: Fedmarket's *Recipe for Writing a Compliant Federal Proposal* is a procedural step-by-step business process for writing a federal proposal. It includes a model fill-in-the-blanks Executive Summary and shows you a complete list of possible win themes.

SECRET #6 – WRITE IN THE CUSTOMER'S VOICE

Proposals written in the customer's voice win. Federal customers know their requirements, and some know the solution to their problems. Other federal customers do not know they have a problem, and you must help them define the problem and the solution. But in all of these situations you must know the customer to know the requirements and solutions.

Secret #6 – *You cannot write in their voice unless you know them at a working level, have extensive experience, or a unique solution*.

Knowing the customer allows solution writers to tailor technical proposals that stand out from the inevitable pile of proposals from other companies. The technical proposal content is usually what determines the companies who land in the zone of consideration (the technically qualified proposals).

Real competition takes place when more than one company knows the customer and, as a result, is determined to be technically qualified. Of this group, the winner is usually the company that knows the customer the best, although price can be a factor in the final decision.

SECRET #7 – EVALUATORS LOVE RISK REDUCTION

Secret #7 – *Government end users hate risks and love risk avoidance*. So, think: risks, risks, and risks when preparing the outline of your approach to the customer solution.

End users have the following types of questions in mind when evaluating proposals:
- Will they deliver the basic contract deliverables?
- How could they fail? and what are they proposing to avoid failure?
- Will the public see the results of the work? and will they feed back positive or negative comments? (e.g., negative experiences with call center operators)
- Will stakeholders see the results? and will they feed back positive or negative comments? (e.g., what did they think of help desk services?)
- What will go in my file if they are successful?
- What will go in my file if they fail partially or completely?
- Is their solution too advanced and more than we need?
- Can they meet the contract timelines?
- What is the factual evidence that they will perform?
- Do they really understand my problem?

Use a risk avoidance approach in stressing specific aspects of your solution—the ones that are critical to success. Don't write a tome on the wonderful reports you will produce without stressing specific design features that are the core of a successful solution. Make the customer feel confident that you understand the critical risks and have the answers to avoid the risks.

Stressing risk avoidance is easier said than done, and that's where creativity in proposal writing comes into play.

Secret #8 – *Avoid the Mortal Sins of Proposal Writing*

Two of the Deadliest Proposal Writing Sins

A service company's two greatest assets are its corporate experience and the background of its staff. Often, both assets are not presented effectively in a company's federal proposals. The following is a summary of common mistakes contractors make when drafting their proposals.

In the case at hand, a company is overwhelmed because it is attempting to write numerous proposals at once. Due to the chaos associated with such a task, the personnel and corporate experience chapters are not dealt with until the last minute because everyone assumes that they are pieces of cake. The thought process is that the company can use corporate experience descriptions and staff resumes from other proposals and plug them in at the last minute into the proposals being drafted.

It's the day before the due date, and the company's new Proposal Manager schedules a meeting with management. The proposal being discussed requires that bidders provide resumes for (i) the prospective Project Manager, (ii) a Senior Oracle DBMS Engineer, and (iii) a Security Specialist (three in total). At the meeting, management tells the Proposal Manager, "We have scads of those types. Let's give the agency six resumes. That will show how strong we are."

The Proposal Manager replies, "With all due respect, Richard White of Fedmarket says we should only give the agency exactly the number of resumes requested and rewrite the resumes to meet each and every requirement in the Request for Proposal (RFP)."

Management responds, "We don't disagree, but the proposal needs to be out the door by 10:00 am tomorrow. Pick six and throw them in. It will be fine."

Furthermore, in our hypothetical, the RFP states that the bidder should submit three corporate experience descriptions demonstrating the company's ability to handle the tasks outlined in the RFP. Management tells the Proposal Manager, "Wow, we can do this type of work in our sleep, and we are the best qualified company out there. Give them six projects. We need to prove to them how eminently qualified we are. By the way, throw in the phrase 'world class' in the corporate experience introduction. We are truly world class in this field and the agency's proposal evaluators need to know this."

The Proposal Manager, an avid reader of this installment series, once again objects and says, "Shouldn't we only give them exactly the number of corporate experience descriptions requested and rewrite them to meet each and every requirement in the

RFP?"

Management's response is similar to the one outlined above. While the meeting is winding down, the Proposal Manager is thinking to himself, "Richard White says we should write fewer proposals and win more. Maybe we shouldn't have attempted three proposals at once."

It isn't difficult to envision what the success rate of this company will be.

Curing the Two Deadly Sins

The previous section discussed the problems of *waiting until the last minute to tackle critical issues* and *providing overblown corporate experience and personnel chapters for federal proposals*. We recommend following the steps outlined below to eliminate such problems.

The Keys to Success
- On the first day of the proposal effort, gather all of the (i) resumes, and (ii) past corporate experience summaries for possible inclusion in the proposal at hand.
- Assign the responsibility for drafting the personnel and corporate experience chapters to the appropriate staff members. We suggest that the Proposal Manager is best equipped to oversee the development of the corporate experience summary.
- Compare all collected resumes with the requirements of the RFP and determine what is missing from the resumes. Call staff members and ask questions such as, "Do you have more Oracle DBMS experience? Your resume only mentions it briefly. Please send me an email describing every instance in which you used Oracle DBMS—no matter how incidental you may think the experience may have been." Give the staff a deadline to provide the requested information and scream to management if the deadlines are not met.
- Follow the process described immediately above for every resume that doesn't meet or exceed the RFP's requirements. Revise the resumes based on the email responses from staff members.
- Repeat the process for drafting the corporate experience summaries. Call Project Managers and ask questions such as: "Did you use any asset management software in performing the ABC contract and do you have any help desk performance statistics that I can cite? If so, tell me all about them in an email." As discussed previously, give the Project Managers a deadline to get back to you.
- Follow the procedure described immediately above for every corporate experience summary that doesn't meet or exceed the RFP's requirements. Revise the summaries based on the email responses from Project Managers.
- Write the necessary chapter introductions and assemble the personnel and corporate experience chapters in draft form. Include exactly the number of

resumes and corporate experience summaries asked for in the RFP. Evaluators attending our proposal writing courses tell us that including more information than asked for in these two chapters can be detrimental to your evaluation score. You not only fail to gain evaluation points, it can cause you to lose points. Evaluators tell us, "We find it annoying to have to read information not requested in the RFP. From our perspective, we assume that you are overdoing it to make a weak company look stronger."

- Send the draft versions of each to management for review early in the process along with excerpts from the RFP outlining the personnel and experience requirements. Management can point out where more tailoring should be done, and the proposal team should have sufficient time to refine them to meet management's expectations.

By tackling the aforementioned issues early on in the project, your proposal team will have more time at the eleventh hour to address more pressing issues. Personnel and experience are two of your most important corporate assets. Your goal should be to not lose a single evaluation point when these assets are evaluated.

Other Sins

Don't just parrot back the RFP requirements. You should rephrase the requirements and add insights that demonstrate an understanding of what you are proposing to do: Why are we doing it this way? What are the benefits of our approach? Why does it reduce costs and minimize the risk of failure?

Don't use broad, unsubstantiated claims like "Collectively our company has 100 person-years of experience…" or "Our company is a world class…" You will make the government evaluators guffaw, and they'll end up subtracting evaluation points. Be subtle and, if you are going to boast, back it up with evidence. If the RFP asks you to submit a key person's resume only, that is what the evaluators want.

Avoid Crises

Companies that either miss or nearly miss proposal submittal deadlines usually don't trumpet their stories to their cohorts. After all, it's not exactly a badge of courage. Yet, at countless bars throughout the Metro area, you frequently will overhear the story, "We hit one hundred miles an hour on the Beltway and made the deadline by five minutes." Or "I hit the send button with a minute to spare and hoped that the email wasn't delayed by busy servers." Or, in a whisper, "We actually missed the deadline on a 10 million dollar deal."
    Why would such a thing happen to supposedly sophisticated federal contractors?

Pure and simple. It's a failure on the part of management to pay attention to the preparation of the proposal. In fact, it's a problem that may never be solved. Proposal

writing is the ugly stepchild of federal contracting. Management hates it, and many bury their heads in the sand and hope it will get out on time.

Don't let this happen to your company. Commit to providing the necessary resources and manpower to get the job done on time and correctly. Otherwise, your staff will be telling similar stories at happy hour.

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SECRET #9 – MAKE YOUR INTERNAL EVALUATIONS MEANINGFUL

What is Wrong with the Proposal Review Process?

Many companies have proposal reviews of different colors. The reviews we'll focus on in this installment are the two most common: Pink and Red Team reviews. The goal of a Pink Team review is to ensure that the structure of the response is appropriate. In other words, the review focuses on whether the win strategy is sound and whether the proposed technical and management approaches support this strategy.

A Red Team review tries to evaluate the persuasiveness of the proposal, i.e., how well the proposal clearly presents and sells the solution. Red Team reviews are usually undertaken when the proposal is essentially complete; suggested changes have already been incorporated in previous reviews. Red Teams reviews try to mimic the customer's evaluation process.

Secret #9 – *In our view, the energy devoted to Pink and Red Team reviews is often wasted*.

The processes are, to say the least, frustrating to the proposal's authors. One can imagine it's difficult from the writers' perspective to see their work hacked up by the reviewers.

So, what is wrong with proposal reviews?

- The process pulls billable employees off billable work and has them attend a review session that they don't want to attend. In many cases they haven't read the draft proposal. The impact on profitability is significant.
- Management doesn't like them and, in many cases, haven't read the draft proposal.
- Frequently attendees make up criticisms to impress.

Secret #10 – *A Proposal Library cuts proposal costs dramatically*. Effective proposal libraries are comprised of a number of individual databases.

Past Performance Library

A past performance library contains past performance write-ups that summarize your organization's experience on different projects. More often than not, you will be asked to reference past performances in your RFP response.

Because of this, you want to make sure that you create an effective past performance library so that you can quickly and effectively pull your experience information into the proposal document without missing a beat: you have plenty of other things you need to worry about—like writing the technical section. You don't want to waste your time with work that can be done up front, even before any RFP is released.

The trick is to organize your past performance project write-ups by theme.

What do we mean by this? Well, the project that you worked on at customer X may need to be tweaked differently to conform to the focus of an RFP. In one instance, you may need the past performance description to stress your development methodology; the next, you may need it to show how well you worked with other vendors. In other words, the same past performance is written up multiple times and filed under two different themes: *development methodology* and *collaboration*.

For each project, you should locate copies of the individual past performance write-ups in a distinct folder. Within each of these folders there may be one or more write-ups of the same project. Multiple write-ups reflect different themes that were originally created to reflect the needs of a particular proposal. Each past performance file is named according to the project name followed by a dash and a brief theme name that refers to the particular thematic emphasis reflected in the write-up. For example, the file name "Alpha Development - planning and project management" refers to a write-up of the Alpha Development project that emphasizes planning efforts and the strength of the Project Manager on this project.

In each project folder, you should also create a separate file that contains the contractual information for a project in the form of a table. The information to be captured here is summary information that should be appended as a header to your chosen past performance write-up. The combination of the summary table and the write-up give you a complete past performance to include in your proposal. As you keep tweaking past performance write-ups to fit new proposal responses, add the tweaked version to that project's past performance folder. After a while, you will find that you

can go back and pick just the right flavor for the proposal you are working on. In other words, you can focus on the hard stuff and not sweat the past performance requirement anymore.

Resume Library

Resumes and the descriptions of a company's corporate experience are the core elements of a proposal that demonstrate a company's capabilities. If a business has actually taken the time to draft them, the documents are often outdated. The company's Proposal Manager often has to scramble at the last minute to get what he or she needs for a proposal going out the door tomorrow only to find that the resumes and corporate experience descriptions are not tailored to the customer's requirements. As a result, proposal quality suffers and nerves are frayed.

Companies that prepare more than 4 or 5 proposals a year should have a full-time Proposal Manager. The Proposal Manager can use the time between proposals to refine the proposal process and keep the resume and corporate experience database current. An up-to-date database will:
- Eliminate the panic that occurs at crunch time when you don't have resumes.
- Allow time to tailor resumes and corporate experience to the customer's requirements.
- Improve the quality of the overall proposal because it will be responsive to the RFP.

Technical staff members must understand the critical parts that resumes and corporate experience descriptions play. Keeping both current should be made a component of the technical staff's job descriptions, and annual reviews should include a critique of each staff member's performance in meeting these responsibilities.

Other Proposal Libraries
- Model Management Plan Sections
- Model Staffing Plan Sections
- Model Quality Control Plan
- Model Transition In and Transition Out Plans
- Previous Winning Proposals
- Model Technical Approaches

FEDMARKET'S RFP DECONSTRUCTION SYSTEM

A typical federal RFP will contain a morass of important and unimportant clauses, a baffling and befuddling list of proposal requirements, and statements of work that are poorly written or insufficient in detail. And all of these items can be spread throughout a poorly organized document.

Missing a detail in this morass can lead you to submit a proposal that does not meet the agency's requirements. A phrase, a misplaced punctuation mark, or an ambiguity in an instruction or requirement can make the difference between success and failure. The complexity of government RFPs demands a highly structured proposal writing process.

Fedmarket has created an *RFP Deconstruction System*. Using this system, a Proposal Manager deconstructs the RFP, sentence-by-sentence and paragraph-by-paragraph, and constructs a detailed proposal outline based on all pertinent items in the RFP.

Why Have a Structured Process?

Consider using all or part of the Fedmarket system. Stick with what you have if you are consistently winning bids. The key to success is having a system (any system) that meets the following five objectives:
1. Ensures compliance with RFP requirements. (Noncompliance is one of the primary ways the government moves your proposal into the "not worthy of further consideration" pile.)
2. Helps writers produce compelling content.
3. Helps to ensure readability, conciseness, and clarity.
4. Reduces proposal costs.
5. Helps to eliminate last-minute proposal production crises. (Management involvement is the primary factor in reducing crises.)

A system that meets these objectives has to be based on the production of a detailed proposal outline early in the proposal writing process. Writing the proposal does not begin until the outline is complete and understood by all parties involved in the writing process. The larger and more complex the requirement, the more important an RFP-driven, detailed outline becomes. Each amendment to the RFP is deconstructed and added to the proposal outline.

Eliminate "Circling"

Most importantly, if done first, the outline eliminates the endless circling around the proposal writing project and wasted billable time, as everyone tries to communicate what the proposal should contain without anyone actual writing anything. Typical circling statements include "Let's have a meeting so I can tell you my ideas, but you

write it," as well as "Let's not write; let's have fun and map out our ideas, themes, and thoughts on whiteboards, and then schedule another meeting to deal with the writing issue."

Help Writers with Writers Block

The suggested RFP deconstruction system becomes a precise and organized roadmap for multiple writers. One of the purposes of the system is to make writing seem like filling in the gaps in an outline. This is particularly important for technical people who don't think they can write. With an outline in hand, writing-challenged techies are more likely to respond, "That's easy, I can do that, I just have to fill in the gaps."

Minimize Protest Risk

Bid protests are on the rise and they are costly for you, your competitors, and the contracting industry. Plus, vendors usually lose.

Fedmarket's RFP Deconstruction System will assist in minimizing the possibility of a bid protest. It will also help defend your company against a competitor's protest of an award made to you.

The suggested deconstruction system makes you examine each critical word in the RFP. You inherently play defense by questioning any RFP flaw, including flaws in the requirements, proposal instructions, evaluation criteria, and so forth. Questions can then be submitted to the Contracting Officer early in the process. (Unless, of course, you think pointing out a flaw would be to your disadvantage.)

The system helps you fend off protests against an award to your company by making your proposal bulletproof—compliant in every way. Specifically, the system will help make sure you:
- Address each and every requirement
- Substantiate all claims
- Check required personnel certifications and related RFP requirements
- Justify your price in every way in case the government attempts to go low bid (price realism rules and you must prove the realism of your price)

Helps with Subcontractor Content and Future Proposals

A detailed outline and template provides two other benefits in producing a winning proposal.
- A template is an absolute necessity for extracting content from subcontractors. Obtaining proposal content from subcontracts is like pulling teeth, and the government-contracting world is abounding with stories about the non-responsiveness of subcontractors. A detailed template doesn't solve all of the problems of subcontractor content, but when they do respond, it improves the

structure, clarity, and quality of what they provide.

- Detailed proposal templates can be stored and improved each time a proposal for similar services is written. In other words, templates evolve and get better and better. The value of legacy technical approach templates depends on the similarity of scopes of work from proposal to proposal. Management plan templates are like gold and can reduce proposal writing costs and quality because contracts are managed in the same way regardless of the scopes of work.

Ask veteran proposal writers, and they will tell you legacy content makes their lives worth living.

It's Harder Than It Appears

Developing a detailed outline is not easy. The catch is that deconstruction of the RFP requires a Proposal Manager with judgment and proposal writing experience. Selecting which items to move from the RFP into the proposal, knowing what content from previous proposals is pertinent, and rewriting resumes and corporate experience requires skill gained from previous proposals. Preparing guidance and instructions for technical writers is a creative process.

An effective Proposal Manager is a valuable asset, and the good ones are highly paid (or should be).

It's Too Hard

Persons new to proposal writing may say: that's too hard. My response is: what part of this would you not do, and why not do everything required in the beginning? All writers are working from a common outline, and the government is getting precisely what they asked for. Outlining is fundamental to good writing. An editor can work with a sequence of clearly organized sentences, but poorly organized content has to be rewritten from scratch.

Fedmarket's Recipe for Writing a Compliant Federal Proposal

The Proposal Writing Recipe is designed specifically for inexperienced proposal writers. The Recipe gives you step-by-step instructions for turning an RFP into a winning proposal. We teach you to write what the evaluators want to read; nothing more, nothing less. Giving the evaluators too much or too little will end up in a loss.

Our Recipe uses templates and model content to reduce writing costs. Successful proposals are built over time using content from previous proposals (legacy or model content).

The Recipe includes four [Samples of Winning Proposals](#) and a [Proposal Library](#) for the following services:

- Information Technology
- Professional Services
- Technical Services
- Construction.

Recipe instructions are presented in two parts:

1. **Part I Building a Draft Proposal Using an Example RFP**. Part 1 presents step-by-step instructions on how to prepare a draft proposal using an example RFP. We explain how to develop a draft proposal using information in the three critical requirements sections of an RFP (Sections L Proposal Instructions, Section M Evaluation Criteria and the Statement of Work). Inexperienced Proposal Managers and writers can read Part 1 until they understand the basics of building a proposal from an RFP. Part 1 can be used as both a reference document during proposal writing projects or as a training tool for new proposal writers.

2. **Part 2 Building a Draft Proposal Using an Actual Example RFP**. Part 2 presents step-by-step instructions on how to build a draft proposal in response to an actual bidding opportunity. In Part 2 you will produce a compliant draft proposal from your own RFP. At the end of Part 2, you will have a complete proposal outline that you can strengthen with subject matter and technical content, edit, and submit to the government.

Win one proposal using the [Recipe](#) and the product will pay for itself many times over.