MBEIC
Minority Business Enterprise Input Committee
Greater New England
MBE Article

Mastering the RFP Process ~ Part 3
Preparation in Thought and Process

Suppose your company has decided to submit a proposal in response to the RFP and has put you in charge, or you're a solo practitioner and want to submit a response to an RFP. Now what? Some large firms have detailed proposal manuals with everything from multiple templates to copying and binding instructions for packaging a proposal. If you aren't so lucky as to work for one of them, or you don't have the commercially available software to help you manage the preparation of your proposals, here's a list of things you need to do.

Here are some easy-to-follow steps to creating an outline to respond to an RFP, or request for proposal. A request for proposal is simply a client's written statement expressing a business need and asking how you propose to address their need and how much your service or product will cost. Creating an outline before writing the response to the client's RFP helps to ensure that all of the client's project requirements have been addressed and that your proposal conforms to the document format specified by the RFP.

Step 1
Carefully read the client's RFP to be sure you fully understand the expectations. Clarify any questions sooner rather than later. Many RFPs specify a question and answer period for respondents.

Step 2
Create the outline in the format and order defined in the RFP, as this will demonstrate the ability to follow directions. Some RFPs leave the organization of the proposal to you, whereas others have highly detailed structural requirements. Ignoring and misinterpreting them is one of the quickest ways to get your proposal dropped from consideration. Your outline should be a complete and accurate reflection of the requirements laid out in the RFP.

Step 3
Outlines are most often developed with Roman Numerals (such as I, II, III) for each major section. Subsections are indented using capital letters (such as A, B, C). Sections under these are denoted using numbers (such as 1,2,3). If another subsection is further required, begin using lower case letters (such as a, b, c). The Roman Numeral I may be used as the overview or summary of the RFP response. Express the scope of services and requirements of the client in this first section. Explain how the project will be approached and why this approach will best address the client's needs. Continue writing the headings and categories of the project as presented by the client using a combination of Roman Numerals, letters and numbers.

Step 4
Brainstorm responses to each section and subsection(s) by writing responses to each client requirement. For the initial draft, words and phrases can be used. The point of the initial draft is to simply write down any and all ideas. Repeat the step for all sections.

Step 5
After brainstorming all sections, begin fleshing out these ideas and adding detailed content to each of them. Develop well-thought out sentences and paragraphs for each section that fully address the client's needs. Your proposal will likely include some of your company's 'boilerplate' or standard, reusable text. Indicate in your outline where boilerplate will be used and how much it will need to be modified for this particular RFP. Don't abuse boilerplate or use it to fatten your proposal! Potential clients appreciate succinct, detail and actionable proposals, not a tome made of all your marketing and materials and technical documents.

Keep in mind that several drafts may need to be developed before the final RFP is developed. If using a computer, note each draft with a different version number in the filename. Identify your business and demonstrate your capabilities that are of most value to your client.

Next Issue: Part 4 - Turn your RFP Strategy into a Sales Booster

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