



Steps To Take Before Writing and Submitting A Government Proposal

A Resource Guide for Government Contractors

Introduction

The U.S. Government is the largest consumer of goods and services in the world. No other government or private sector business comes close.

To meet its growing and extensive needs, our federal government depends on reliable American contractors. Many of these businesses derive a significant amount of their yearly revenue by providing products and services to federal customers. Though their experience makes them formidable competitors, the government has set-aside many opportunities for small and mid-sized businesses, minority owned, women-owned and disadvantaged businesses, and is often looking for companies that deliver a better option.

Writing and submitting a proposal for a federal government RFP or contract opportunity requires a lot of due diligence, attention to detail and insight.

Competition for government contracts is very high, and the government is a very risk-averse buyer that carefully scrutinizes proposals to ensure that the winning business or businesses meet its needs and demonstrate the capability to perform the work required, and can do both at a price that aligns to available budget and resources.

Your attention to detail, as well as your company's financial stability and internal capabilities will all be examined and put to the test.

To aid you in the process of writing and submitting a proposal that gives your company the best chance for success, we have put together some important tips designed to serve as a checklist for each RFP you respond to.

1. Gather Valuable Information

Your capabilities, competitor intelligence and agency background are critical pieces of information to gather at the start of the process.

You must start with an honest assessment of your company's capabilities. If an RFP has been released, read through the requirements of the RFP you are interested in and make sure you can map the government's requirements back to your capabilities.

If you are anticipating an opportunity, create a preliminary outline of requirements. This is where looking at similar initiatives from other agencies can help you to get a head start.

Next, you need to determine likely competitors. If you do not know which companies are competing, you won't be able to make an educated "Bid, No Bid" decision based on your competitive position. You need to know if you could be bidding against an incumbent or companies with a lot of past experience on similar projects at other agencies.

Finally, and perhaps most important, you need to know about your customer. If this is a re-compete, are they happy with the incumbent? If this is a new opportunity, what is driving the need? Can you build a clear picture of the customer's story? Knowing who you are submitting a bid to and their pain points can help you develop an appropriate strategy that fits their internal policy, meets their demands and needs.

2. Organize Your Ideas

Ideally, you should start to think about your proposal before the final RFP has been released. Analyze the opportunity the moment you have some information so you can begin to prepare.

We recommend that you read the draft solicitation carefully and make an outline of your main ideas. Structure what you see as the primary challenges facing the government customer and group into a logical order. Then create a separate column to identify / map to your capabilities / solutions.

Another piece to the puzzle that you should start to organize is your timing to deliver your solutions to the government, and costs and pricing. Timing and costs can be impacted by things such as new employee hires, training or managing legacy staff, as well as implementation of technology or code development. Regardless of the size of the agency or the potential contract award, covering all the complex details from the earliest moments and organizing ideas and a potential approach will improve your final proposals cohesion.

3. Know the Solicitation Requirements

The pre-solicitation may have been very detailed, and you may have spent a significant amount of time to organize your strategy. Unfortunately, you need to discard the pre-solicitation and go through the final solicitation requirements with a fine-tooth comb. The government may not change many details. But when the government receives questions from established government contractors, they may make seemingly small changes that significantly change how you address the RFP.

This is where it is often a benefit to have two teams or “fresh eyes” to read the final RFP before you have the full team read it. You want the assessment to be as sharp as possible, because the details are all that matters.

Pay special attention to these sections of the RFP solicitation: Statement of Work, Solution and Pricing. Address them properly by giving supporting evidence for your solution. Establish a price to win. Make sure to estimate all your expenses and set the price based on a realistic approach.

4. Define Your Proposal Team and Process

Defining your proposal team and designing a successful proposal process can help you complete your proposal development more efficiently and successfully.

A proposal is only as good as the people you bring into the development process. Therefore, it is essential that you select the right group of people and define the roles and responsibilities appropriately to make sure that project team members understand their tasks. They should know in detail what is expected from them and need to know this in advance in order to ensure quality and perseverance to meet the ultimate goal.

The next step is to create the process. A well-structured process can help you assess the progress and the quality of your product against set standards. A proposal process plan guides team members at each step and is especially helpful to the proposal writers. For proposal writers, a process provides them with accurate instructions to ensure quality and develop a winning proposal.

Moreover, it provides a structure that enables you to set expectations during project development. You should describe what you need, and the way that each member should deliver their part of the job.

5. Secure Outside Professional Support

We know that running a successful business and focusing on core activities that actually generate your revenues leaves little to no time for anything else. That's why we urge you to consider professional assistance when it comes to responding to a Federal RFP.

An expert in government proposal writing can help construct your proposal team and guide the development process to ensure it is managed professionally. This will ensure your company avoids unwanted mistakes and can present the right themes that can absolutely improve your winning chances.

Another area of professional need is in proposal formatting, graphics and other technical resources that may not exist in your organization or be available consistently through the proposal development process. Some agencies have requested video submissions to outline solutions to technical and staffing challenges.

A government proposal is not the time to stretch your internal resource beyond their abilities or rely on people who do not have the bandwidth to contribute. You need skill, precision and time to complete the proposal well.

6. Know Your Pricing and Return On Investment

Many contractors leave pricing to the end of the proposal writing process.

Pricing is one of the most critical components of a proposal, and should never be rushed or taken lightly. As we recommended above, pricing is something that should start to take shape in the early idea phase and be revisited throughout the process.

The same is true for knowing your return on investment (ROI). You cannot make a “Bid, No Bid” decision without knowing your ROI.

Pricing strategy and ROI are critical elements, and often times it pays to have an outside expert deliver an assessment of your offering. You will want as much insight as possible into what a competitive bid may look like as well as what a realistic bid from your company will look like.

7. Meet the Requirements

One of the easiest and most common ways to be dropped from consideration for a government contract is to submit a non-compliant or “non-responsive” proposal.

Government contract officers and teams go through great lengths to identify and outline all their requirements, and to specify what information they need and how they want it presented. However, many businesses do not include all the information asked for in the RFP, or they fail to submit responses or critical documents by deadlines.

Submitting a proposal is the first step in your formal relationship with the government. When you fail to meet the requirements at this stage, the government considers that a “deal breaker” and removes the proposal from consideration.

Remember, the government is looking to acquire products and/or services that are low risk and within their budget. Since a government RFP or contracting opportunity could receive dozens to hundreds of complex bids and submissions, a failure to meet requirements demonstrates that you are not a reliable partner – hence – you are higher risk.

This is why we recommend you know the requirements. But we also stress that knowing is only half the battle. You also need to meet the requirements.

You may think you are doing the government a favor by adding your own creative touches or deciding what information they really need to have, because you are industry leader or expert. But at the end of the day, you run the risk of actually showing the government customer you cannot follow their instructions. If the government wants your proposal in a specific font, you deliver it in the font the government wants. If the government wants a video submission, you provide a video submission. If the government wants your plan for staffing a legacy solution, you provide a plan for staffing their legacy solution.

8. Review Everything

Lastly, you need to review everything. This is where an independent, third-party expert can really be an asset.

Often times when proposals are developed, we become so close to the proposal that we miss the obvious flaws. Days and weeks of discussions, edits and reviews can create a situation where you start to read thoughts and opinions into text that are not represented by the words on the page.

When you plan out the process, make sure you have a set of experienced eyes that can review everything from the RFP to planning documents to pricing to the proposal itself. Catching an error in pricing or terms, locating a missing response or correcting confusing language / making statements more concise can make the difference between serious consideration and rejection for non-compliance.



GDI Consulting

Your Government Contract Experts

2800 Eisenhower Avenue
Suite 220
Alexandria, VA 22314
Tel: 571-206-4460
Email: info@gdicwins.com