**How to Lose with Your Proposal**

One of the most discussed aspects of writing proposal is all of the information the BD gurus, the Capture specialists, or proposal maestros will give about what you should do to create the “bestest” document that has ever been submitted; one that will have the evaluators having an epiphany and the realization that your company can eliminate world hunger if they just ensure you get a contract.

\Sarcasm off

The reality is, as I believe we all recognize, that it’s much easier to lose a bid than it is to win one. For this episode, I want to explore a few things that, if you don’t do them, all your work may be for naught. I spend quite a bit of time perusing GAO protest decisions to make sure I can advise my clients correctly. The following snippets have been gleaned from what I’ve seen in practice and what I’ve read in those decisions. (Hat tip to Dr. Bob Frey for inspiring this episode.

**Do not simply repeat the Statement of Work.** Too often when I’m working with clients, particularly those that don’t have a high level of client intimacy, the tendency is to take the RFP’s shall statements and change the shalls to wills. In fact, over the last few years, the Government has specifically stated NOT to do this in your response. This will make your proposal seem generic and uninspired. Instead, take the time to understand the requirements and provide detailed, specific responses.

**Address the details.** Don't just skim the RFP and assume you know what's required. Read it carefully and make sure you understand all the details. If you're not sure about something, ask for clarification. The GAO has held that any burden from questions not asked always falls on the vendor NOT the Government!

**Use the keywords from the RFP.** This will help the government evaluators find your proposal when they're searching for specific information. In procurements where the response is large and the number of bidders is also large, keyword searching by evaluators is NOT unusual. If they can’t find the keywords, then your evaluation will suffer.

**Provide evidence of strengths.** Don't just tell the government how good you are. Show them. Provide specific examples of your past successes and how you plan to use your skills and experience to meet the requirements of this project. Use quantities and statistics. Pharses like “we retain 95 percent of all incumbent employees during transition” or “ our methods provided a 14% reduction in cost” will work in your favor \_\_ just make sure that the stats are true.

**Don’t assume Incumbency is a Strength.** Too often client seem to think that a win is “in the bag” because they are the incumbent. Realize that the Government is recompeting the contract for a reason that may or may not be in the incumbent’s best interest. It’s true that many times a contract is recompeted simply because the old one reaches its end and can’t be extended. But even then, that doesn’t mean the incumbent is a shoo-in. New administrator, different evaluators, and changes in agency priorities can all have an impact on the strength of incumbency. On the flip side, I’ve had client no bid opportunities because they think they have no chance to unseat an incumbent. Well, you can’t if you don’t bid. That’s not to say you shouldn’t make an informed decision to bid against an incumbent, just don’t over-estimate the value of incumbency, either as an incumbent or not.

**Be Mindful of Your Pricing in the Market.** My experience is that small businesses are much more price competitive with each other than larger businesses. Small businesses are very intent on not pricing themselves out of the market so when the bids are received, small businesses tend to cluster. With larger businesses, there is always the possibility of there being an outlier that tries to buy the bid. Larger businesses can be more successful with that strategy since they have other programs to absorb the profit hit. Smaller businesses just can’t do that.

Some additional tips for writing a winning proposal:

* Be clear and concise.
* Use active voice and strong verbs.
* Proofread your proposal carefully before submitting it.

Remember that the use of a third-party during your reviews can be invaluable in picking up on things that might have been missed. I believe this is particularly true for recompetes by incumbents.

That’s it for this episode. As always, suggestions, critiques, and comments can be sent to me at ken.blair@fedprops.com. Or give me a call at 301-859-0316.