

Top Ten Tips for Writing Winning Proposals

- 1. Follow RFP outline slavishly—Make the evaluator's job easy:** *Nobody* has a better outline than the program officials whose program you target because score sheets follow the RFP outline; include an RFP cross reference after headings that addresses a) proposal contents outline and b) evaluation principles and criteria
Have seen evaluators knock proposals off the table because they could not easily locate score-able items—especially if they perform a word search and the phrase is not present!
 - 2. Be responsive:**
 - Indicate a) what challenges the project will involve, how to avoid them, and how to ameliorate them if they materialize and b) how you will perform tasks; do not simply regurgitate requirements
 - Demonstrate *how* your project supports objectives and goals
 - Where feasible, include collaborative work and members of under-represented groups
 - 3. Limit discriminator lists to 3-7 critical items:** Provide 3-7 succinct statements with precise data on why your solution/team are best qualified and tell evaluators where you will elaborate on them in the proposal
 - 4. Demonstrate strong management:** Indicate that your team is technically outstanding, but it is also critical to demonstrate you have experienced management and have the ability to act as a team
 - 5. Fill proposal roles and provide sound processes:** Proposal team members may assume multiple roles but assign all roles: PI, proposal manager, writer, SME, reviewer, editor, artist, desktop specialist, and budget lead; have a clear process guide that spells out steps/responsibilities and provides means to deliver good reviews
 - 6. Make it a marketing document:** Many writers focus on offering a tech solution that a journal editor would publish, when evaluators really want evidence your project is do-able and the team can perform effectively
 - 7. Write to a general audience:** Evaluation teams often have reviewers who are not current in your specialty (e.g., program officers, senior administrators, experts from other fields), so write in clear, concise prose free of jargon
 - 8. Develop a thorough basis-of-estimate for the budget:** Start early—Requires interaction among numerous groups such as technical, management, administrators, partners, and outside vendors to create estimates:
 - Roles including consultants, level of effort, duration, labor rates, and overhead
 - Bill of materials—equipment, software, tools, licenses
 - Miscellaneous budget elements—travel, external services, and security
 - 9. Demonstrate past-performance quality:** Focus on how past work relates to target program project description items for size, scope, complexity, and accomplishments (quality)—Focus on *your work quality* and not just *what* you did
 - Size:** a) project dollar value and b) number of Full-Time Equivalents
 - Scope**
 - Explain how project tasks that relate directly to RFP or SOW requirements
 - Users are of the same as or similar to those that the RFP involves
 - Complexity**
 - Number and type of locations—domestic sites; foreign cultures and languages involved
 - Number of clients, teaming partners, client organizations, or integrated product team members
 - Number of elements in technical solution—e.g., lines of code, pieces of equipment, phases
 - Number of key personnel employed—pre-award designation of key personnel
 - Security: # and level of security clearances required; security facility and storage requirements
 - Technical sophistication of product, service, or solution
 - Challenges bred of working uncharted territory—new process, technology, organization
 - Standards/frameworks employed—CMMI, Earned Value Management, ISO, ITIL, PMP
 - Accomplishment types**
 - Innovations and improvements
 - Problems averted or solved
 - Milestones/goals exceeded—Budget, management, quality, schedule, deliverables, closeout
 - Benefits/value to client
 - 10. Tailor resumes to the project:** Because each project is unique, tailor resumes to specific project tasks and indicate clearly *where* and *how* the individual's accomplishments match project tasks
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