

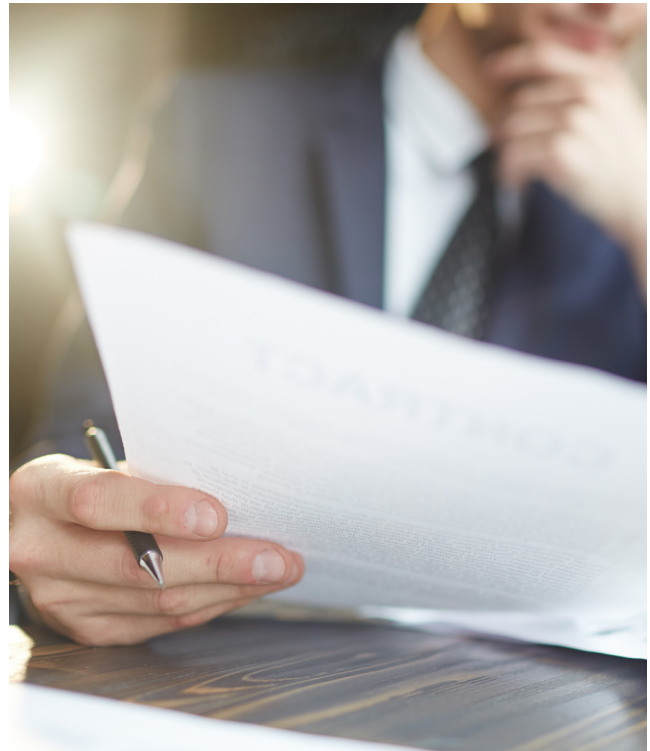
Tips for Bidding on Government Contracts

# How to Write a Strong Proposal



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Some say that it is harder to fulfill government contract bid requirements than it is to meet actual contract requirements. It's easy to impress customers once you're on board and doing what you do best. But getting your foot in the door requires you to first prove your expertise, capabilities and value on paper, and that can be a challenge — especially if you don't have prior performance records or a previous supplier relationship with the agency to back up your claims.

That's why it's critical to continuously fine-tune your proposal writing skills.

Whether you are responding to your first solicitation or routinely submitting bids, agencies' evaluation criteria and expectations are always growing. As is the competition.

If you want to make your proposal stand out — and secure more contract awards — you must be strategic and detail-oriented in the development process. This step-by-step guide will help you get started.



**Do your homework...  
before you go to work.**

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## Understand how the bid will be evaluated

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Public sector organizations want to get the most bang for their buck. That's why they are increasingly awarding contracts to companies that offer the "best value" versus just looking for the supplier with the lowest price. They want to know that your company is trustworthy, reliable and customer-centric. So, they will weigh a more holistic combination of factors when rating proposals, to include performance history, availability, experience, and references. Therefore, you must confirm how proposals will be evaluated in order to determine your positioning.

### TIP

#### **KNOW WHAT MATTERS MOST:**

If an agency is buying a commodity, or on a tight budget, then pricing might be the most "valued" criteria in your proposal. Yet, specialization or quality might be prioritized more for a service. But you won't know for sure if you don't ask.

## Understand the mission and priorities of the agency

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Want your proposal to resonate with decision makers? Then you have to get to know your audience. It's a principle that's very basic and easily forgotten. Research the requesting agency. Understand its mission and values. Pick up the phone and speak to the procurement team. Ask about the agency's goals and challenges. Then ditch the "one size fits all" proposal template and commit to writing a more tailored response that speaks the customer's language and thoroughly addresses pain points.

### TIP

#### **CUSTOMIZATION IS KEY TO SUCCESS:**

There is no "one size fits all" approach to RFP responses. You need to be adaptable and customize each response based on criteria of each agencies RFP.



## See what a winning proposal actually looks like

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Working in a vacuum is never a good idea. Oracle once came under fire because it submitted a bid that was millions of dollars higher than any other company. Don't repeat its mistake. Review past solicitations and contracts for the requesting agency. See which bids were successful, especially in the category in which you're currently competing, and understand why certain suppliers were selected. Be sure your proposal is competitive in terms of price, quality, and other noted evaluation factors.

### TIP

#### DO YOUR HOMEWORK:

Many agencies share bids and contracts as part of public record disclosures. If you can't locate the information, contact the agency to request. It can help you understand your customer and potential competition.

## Register your business with the customer's supplier network(s)

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Many agencies require vendors to complete a registration process before they can submit a contract bid. If this is your first time submitting a proposal, verify that your business is registered according to the rules and regulations that govern the requesting agency as they will vary from the federal, state and local levels. Also confirm if there are pre-requisites to bidding, such as special licensing, insurance or certifications. Make sure you have those administrative items in place before investing any time or expense into writing a proposal.

### TIP

#### GET CERTIFIED:

If you own a small business — or your business is minority, woman or veteran owned — get the proper certifications to validate your disadvantaged business entity (DBE) status. It can give you a competitive advantage.

## Meet with decision makers in person and become a stronger supplier candidate on paper

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Meeting with representatives from the requesting agency, such as the purchasing officer, will give you important insight into its current operating structure, project plans, and/or supplier expectations. You'll be able to clarify vague solicitation requirements and refine your response accordingly.



**Confirm that you are a qualified candidate.**

## Wow them in the first two lines — but don't leave out any details later on

First impressions are everything, even if you are only “meeting” on paper. If reviewers are not captivated by what you have to say in the first two lines of your proposal, they may stop reading right then and there — even if you really are the supplier offering the best value or lowest price. Just be sure to read — and respond to — every other question they asked in the solicitation. The first two lines don't tell the whole story.

## Show them you are a team player — and the best partner/supplier for the mission at hand

If you want to rise to the top of the pack, articulate how the requesting agency will boost their return on investment (ROI) by choosing you as its “partner.” Prove that you are committed to its success and will prioritize its best interest (not yours). And show them that you fully understand — and commit to supporting — strategic agency goals. Tell them why it would be a mistake to select any other supplier for this opportunity.

### TIP

#### GET OUTSIDE HELP:

If certain RFP requirements fall outside your company's expertise, consider partnering with a business that can fulfill those aspects of the solicitation.

### TIP

#### GET CERTIFIED:

If your business is minority, woman or disabled veteran owned, get the proper certifications to validate this. Public sector contract awards to businesses that fall in these three categories are increasing.

## REMEMBER THAT EVERY BID IS A WIN (IN SOME WAY)

If your bid is successful, your company will enjoy new income and have a means to growth. If you aren't awarded the contract this time, then at least you learned a thing or two in the process to strengthen your submission next time. But why wait until then to get things right? As Rick Page wrote, “hope is not a strategy.”

For the record, neither is cutting and pasting the same content in every bid.



Write to win.



While there will always be lessons to learn when bidding on government contracts, there's no need to learn everything the hard way. Don't spend hours, or days, preparing a winning proposal only to find out that you weren't selected because you made a simple – and avoidable – mistake. Steer clear of the common pitfalls outlined below.

## A proposal that is:

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- **TOO LONG.** There is a balancing act between properly addressing the criteria set out in the solicitation and including too much information. If your proposal is overwhelming, it will be counted out early in the review process.
- **TOO TECHNICAL.** Don't assume that the people reviewing your bids have the same technical expertise as you. Explain your product, service or system as if you were talking to a neighbor at a backyard BBQ. But do confirm that it meets requested specs.
- **NOT STRUCTURED TO MATCH THE SOLICITATION.** Your proposal should follow the same format as the RFP or bid solicitation. This makes it easier for reviewers to search for certain response components and confirm that you've met all criteria.
- **MISSING INFORMATION.** While you may get dinged for including too much info, you'll be disqualified automatically if you omit key information. Conduct an extra pre-submission audit to make sure that you've addressed every requirement.
- **RIFE WITH SPELLING AND GRAMMAR ERRORS.** Have a third party, either a colleague or other industry professional, review your proposal to ensure that there are no spelling and grammatical errors. It doesn't matter what your company does – there is no excuse for poor grammar and spelling.
- **LACKING AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE REQUESTING AGENCY'S PROBLEM/REQUESTED SOLUTION/PRIORITIES.** Don't get so caught up in demonstrating your past performance value that you fail to communicate how you'll solve the customer's current problems. Take a step back and ensure you're speaking to how you will support the priorities they value most right now.



**Don't be that person  
or proposal.**

## Final Note

Pursuing government business opportunities can be a key contributor to the continued growth of your company. If you choose to cast a wide net in your solicitation search, that's okay. Just be sure that you're not setting yourself up for failure before you get started on the real work by spending extensive time and money responding to solicitations that don't align well with your current capabilities. There's "go after everything" and then there's strategic growth.

Periscope S2G Premium is the largest bid notification service in the country. Our team will lead you to all of the current government opportunities that, with well-crafted bid submissions, will open new doors for you.



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