

Beyond the Secrets:

The crash course in how to create successful public sector proposals

A special presentation to:



Presented by:

Keith Parker
The Proposal Centre
(613) 482-0323

keith@theproposalcentre.ca



Agenda

- Opportunity Review
- The Bid-No Bid Decision
- Questions of Clarification
- The Proposal Shell
- Proposal Strategy
- Responding to the Evaluation Criteria
- Managing the Proposal Effort
- Après Proposal Activities



Opportunity Review

- You have an opportunity, now what?
 - What is the opportunity?
 - What is the client seeking?
 - What are your objectives?
 - What criteria must be met?
 - Are the terms and conditions acceptable?



Types of Solicitations

- Request for Proposal
- Request for Quote
- Request for Information
- Request for Standing Offer
- Request for Supply Arrangement
- Other Contract Vehicles
 - Vendor of Record, Source List, Supplier Database, Purchasing Tools



Key elements of solicitation documents

- Identifiers
 - e.g. Client name, solicitation title and number, client contact
- Opportunity Abstract
- Submission Instructions
 - e.g. Due date, delivery instructions, # of copies, label, format and layout specifications
- Proposal Content
 - Proposal outline and content
 - Financial bid



Key elements of solicitation documents (cont.)

- Evaluation Criteria
 - Mandatory and Rated
- Basis of Selection
 - Method to select the winner
- Statement of Work and/or Technical Specifications
- Terms and Conditions
 - RFP Process
 - Resulting Agreement



Initial Review and Assessment

- A quick screening (5-15 minutes)
- Scan the RFP to determine:
 - Due date
 - Nature and scope of the project
 - Mandatory and rated criteria
- Is it a reasonable opportunity for you?
 - Is it work you want to do and is the budget reasonable?
 - Are you likely able to meet all mandatory criteria and score well on the rated criteria?
 - Can you respond on time?



Detailed Review and Assessment

- A closer look to build a case for a bid-no bid decision
- Statement of Work and Technical Specifications
 - What is the full scope of the project and how does it affect your solution/offering?
- How will the winner be determined?
 - Best Value (e.g. weighted scoring, cost per point)
 - Low Cost Compliant
- Evaluation Criteria
 - Detailed walk through of each criterion



Detailed Review and Assessment (Cont.)

- Terms and Conditions
 - Terms specific to the solicitation process
 - Bid validity period, no proposal costs, rights of the buyer
 - Timeframe for enquiries
 - Terms specific to the resulting agreement
 - Invoicing instructions, confidentiality, termination
 - Clauses that may affect your bid:
 - Varies by industry and firm
 - Examples include security clearance, insurance, permits, intellectual property, limitation of liability



The Bid-No Bid Decision

- Always make a formal Bid–No Bid decision
- Possible Reasons to bid:
 - You have a good chance at winning and in achieving a business goal (profit, growth, other)
 - You want to introduce yourself
 - It is a learning opportunity
- Avoid bids where:
 - You are not compliant
 - The bid is wired to a competitor
 - Look for obscure requirements or a competitor’s methodology
 - The bid investment is disproportionate to the potential benefits



Criteria for the Bid-No Bid decision

- Does this fit our short and/or long-term goals?
 - Turn a profit / Grow revenues
 - Diversify client base / Enter new markets
- Can we successfully deliver if we win?
 - Solid understanding of the work to be done
 - Right capabilities and available capacity
 - Understanding of and ability to manage risks involved
 - Partnering options



Criteria for the Bid-No Bid decision (Cont.)

- Can we win?
 - Compliant with all mandatory criteria
 - Score well on rated criteria
 - Inherent advantages or disadvantages
 - Incumbent vendors
 - Existing relationships or insights
 - Competition and differentiators
 - Adequate time to submit a quality proposal



Making the Bid-No Bid Decision

- Three Areas to Consider
 - Does this fit our short and/or long-term goals?
 - Can we successfully deliver?
 - Can we win?
- If Yes to all – Bid!
- Otherwise:
 - Address and resolve areas of concern before bidding
 - Understand and accept the risks of bidding
 - Don't bid



Questions of Clarification

- Used to seek clarification or suggest improvements
- Typically a very formal process
 - Questions submitted in writing
 - Answers distributed to all bidders
 - Questions must be asked within a specific timeframe
- Monitor amendments closely



Reasons for Asking Questions

- Ask questions or seek amendments that will:
 - Clarify the RFP, Project, or Contract
 - Enable you to comply or score well
 - Position your offering favourably
 - Add complexity for the competition
 - Improve the outcome for the client



Asking Questions

- Be respectful
- Refer to a specific section of the solicitation document
- Make it easy to get the answer you want
 - “Please confirm that...”
 - Justify your request
- Understand the risks in asking the question
 - What is the impact of a wrong answer?
 - What will it tell the competition?



Common Question and Answer Topics

- **Mandatory or rated criteria**
 - Clarification to ensure a precise response
 - Request an amendment to remove a barrier to bidding (unduly harsh/unrelated qualifications)
- **Terms and conditions**
 - e.g. Security Clearance, Insurance, Limitation of Liability
- **Scope of work, budget, client's vision or desired approach**
- **RFP process or instructions**
- **Extension of the bid closing date**



Sample Question 1

“In the project summary table, “E-mail address” is noted as “if available”. Please note that sometime a fax number is also not available. Please confirm that a project will not be disqualified as a result of a fax number being unavailable.”



Sample Question 2

Requirement 'b)' for B1-MT1 for Offerors who have been incorporated less than 3 years as of August 30, 2011 due to a corporate change is unreasonable and unfairly punishes forward thinking, successful businesses who quickly move from sole proprietorship to incorporating.

Take the example of three companies, all of which meet requirements a, c, d, and e as listed under "For the purpose of B1-MT1": (page 23)

Company A: Started April 2007, Incorporated February 2010

Company B: Started April 2007, Incorporated April 2010

Company C: Started July 2008, Incorporated August 2011



Sample Question 2 (Cont.)

Company A does not qualify.

Company B qualifies despite having no additional experience over Company A. The only difference is immaterial – Company B simply incorporated two months later than Company A.

Company C qualifies despite having 1 year, 3 months less experience than Company A. Company C has also only been incorporated less than a month before the bid closing date! Company C has no track record as a corporation, and less overall experience, and yet it qualifies over company A.

Despite its experience, Company A will not be in a position to submit a proposal until August 2013 when it will have a total of 6 years in business.



Sample Question 2 (Cont.)

As a result of the disproportionate and inequitable nature of requirement 'b)' as demonstrated above, we request that requirement 'b)' be changed to reflect a cumulative 3 years between the times before and after the corporate change.

As a suggestion, the following can be added to item b) – “In the case of a corporate change where a sole proprietorship was converted into a corporation, the Supplier must have been in business for a combined total (before and after the date of the corporate change) of at least 3 years as of August 30, 2011.

Thank you and kind regards,



The Proposal Shell

- The proposal shell is your foundation, it allows you to focus on what is important
- Build a shell unique to the RFP
 - Address every requirement
 - Make it easy for the evaluator to evaluate
 - Organization of the proposal
 - Approach to answering each question
 - Follow the RFP instructions precisely
- Plan the proposal effort according to the shell
- Track project status according to progress against the shell



Elements of the Proposal Shell

- Title Page
- Cover Letter
- Table of Contents
- Executive Summary and/or Response Grids
- Proposal Body
- Appendices



Proposal Shell – Title Page

- Title (e.g. “Proposal” or “Section I: Technical Proposal”)
- Client Name
- RFP/Solicitation Title and Number
- Streams Proposed (if applicable)
- Closing/Due Date and Time
- Bidder Information:
 - Company Logo, Name, and Address
 - Contact Person Name and Title
 - Contact Information: Telephone, Fax, Email, Website



Proposal Shell – Cover Letter

- Use Company Letterhead
- Closing Date
- Bid Delivery Address incl. Contract Authority
- Subject: i.e. “RE: Solicitation No: ###”
- Respectful courteous greeting and Introduction
- Company Overview or Executive Summary
- General notes:
 - Confidentiality of the information provided
 - Acknowledgement and agreement with the terms and conditions
 - Courteous closing paragraph with contact information
- Salutation, Signature, Name and Title



Proposal Shell – Proposal Layout and Format

- Styles
 - Numbered Headings (e.g. 1.0, 1.1, 1.1.1, etc.)
 - Standardize fonts for headings and body
- Headers and Footers
 - Proposal Section
 - Client Name, Solicitation Title and Number
 - Company Logo
 - Due Date
 - Notice of Confidentiality
 - Page Numbering
- Adjust corporate standard to meet RFP requirements



Proposal Shell – Response Grids

- Summary responses to the mandatory and rated criteria

Criteria	How Met?	Section/ Page	Comply? (mandatory) or Score (rated)
Criterion (from RFP)	Summary Response	Cross reference to bid	“Yes” Or ##



Step by Step Guide for Building the Shell

1. Fill in all RFP specific identifiers (title, number, due date...)
2. Tailor the template (e.g. headers/footers) as per RFP instructions
3. Embed forms, RFP front page (if applicable)
4. Build Response Grids
5. Build Proposal Outline
 - a. May or may not be specified in the RFP
 - b. Ensure all elements are included (e.g. Certifications, Forms, Signatures, etc.)
 - c. Follow any instructions or proposal outline provided
6. Paste relevant RFP excerpts under the applicable sections
7. Prepare delivery label



Proposal Strategy

- Why will the client choose you?
 - Scoring based on firm, objective evaluation criteria (yes or no style rating scheme)
 - Subjective criteria and/or open-ended evaluation scoring system
- Determine and document the key messages that the client will value and identify with
- Ensure this is communicated to all authors and participants



Determining your proposal strategy

Objective Evaluation

- Many formal public sector solicitations will be substantially objective
- Answer each mandatory and rated criteria fully
- Focus only on what is requested in the RFP, there are no bonus points for providing additional information

Subjective Evaluation

- Most bids (private or public sector) will have subjective elements
- Identify 3 or 4 key reasons for the client to choose you. Examples of themes include:
 - Price/financial
 - Track record
 - Unique benefits of your approach/offering
 - Quality of your proposed team



Implementing the Proposal Strategy

- Win Themes
 - Integrate your proposal strategy into the proposal (3 to 4 key reasons why the client will choose you)
 - Win themes should be spread out and consistent across the whole proposal

Example Theme: Risk Management

Understanding

Discuss the importance of closely monitoring project risks and the potential impacts if they don't

Approach

In addition to a risk management section, discuss risks associated with specific activities and how you intend on managing it.

Corporate/Personnel

In reference projects, present past examples of risks successfully managed. In personnel write-ups, highlight qualifications and expertise.



Responding to the Evaluation Criteria

- Your #1 Objective:

**ANSWER
THE
QUESTION**



Building a compliant/well-rated response

- Step 1: Answer the question and support your answer *within the proposal body*
 - Use RFP/Client Terminology
 - Be direct and concise, yet detailed
- Step 2: Summarize your response in the “Grid”
 - Open with a direct answer
 - Support your answer briefly
 - Focus on the relevance of your answer to the client.
- Step 3: In the grid, insert a cross-reference to where the answer appears within the proposal body.



Response Example

- Proposed resource must/should demonstrate 5 years of experience in project management:
 - Review and tailor candidate's C.V. as appropriate:
 - In grid, answer directly and support the answer briefly:
 - e.g. Candidate has 5 years, 7 months of experience in project management as demonstrated by the following projects:
 - <client name>, <project name>, <month year> to <month year>
 - In grid, add a cross-reference to the proposal



Responding to Objective Requirements

- Objective requirements leave minimal room for interpretation:
 - Clear yes or no answer
 - Clear method of awarding points
- Focus is on providing a direct answer with clear supporting information
 - Required support may be specified in the RFP
- If the entire bid evaluation is objective, there is no need to develop/integrate win themes



Examples of Objective Requirements

- Five (5) years in business
 - Provide your certificate of incorporation
- Three (3) project references for similar work. Similar work is defined as a desktop migration for 1,000 users in a federal government department
 - Set-up a template for writing up your projects that describes the work that was done (desktop migration), the number of users, and the client



Examples of Objective Requirements (Cont.)

- Five (5) years of experience in Java programming
 - Build résumé to present relevant projects in reverse chronological order
 - Each project should include:
 - Client Organization, Project Name, Role, Timeframe
 - Description of the work that was done – ensure “Java Programming” appears in each applicable write-up
 - Write-up the response in the grid, indicating the amount of experience in years and months, along with a bulleted list of applicable projects (client, project, timeframe)
 - Insert Cross-references to the résumé



Examples of Objective Requirements (Cont.)

- For calculating years of experience:
 - Do not double count time (i.e. no overlap)
 - Adjust for gaps
- How much experience does this add up to?
 - P1: DND MASIS, March 2010 to February 2011
 - P2: CIC GCMS, January 2009 to December 2010
 - P3: SumHiTeko, January 2006 to December 2007
- Answer: 4 years, 2 months



Examples of Objective Requirements (Cont.)

- The proposed COTS solution will be evaluated based on the following features:
 - Ability to import existing data (5 points)
 - Ability to create custom reports (10 points)
 - Pre-developed reports as listed in Section 6.4.1 (1 point each)
 - Under headings for each item, describe the features of the system as they relate to the required features
 - Include screenshots and/or formal documentation proving the solution's capabilities



Responding to Subjective Requirements

- Subjective requirements do not specify a clear method for awarding points
 - Vague Requirements e.g. “Experience”
 - Scoring based on “quality” of the response e.g. 10 points-excellent, 8 points-very good...
- Responses need to:
 - Connect with the evaluator(s)
 - Be as comprehensive as possible
 - Demonstrate similarities/relevance to the client
- Incorporation of win themes is very important



Responding to Subjective Requirements (Cont.)

- Determine “the question”
 - Look for insight within the RFP
 - Consider any insight you have of your client
 - Ask a question of clarification
- “Answer” (grid and proposal body)
 - An executive summary of your supporting information
- Supporting information
 - Similar to information provided for objective requirements
 - Likely more comprehensive and less targeted



Examples of Subjective Requirements

- Past Project Experience – 15 points
 - Identify attributes of the project and/or the client organization which the client will perceive as important
 - e.g. Dollar value, duration, industry, work to be done
 - Select projects that have similar attributes
 - Highlight similar attributes in each project write-up
 - In particular, discuss any attributes related to win themes
 - Overtly describe “Similarity to the proposed project”
 - Highlight achievements and outcomes
 - Include an introductory paragraph summarizing the key points that you want the client to focus on



Examples of Subjective Requirements (Cont.)

- Approach and Methodology – 40 Points
 - Evaluation method is typically unpredictable
 - Section introduction and grid
 - Focus on elements related to win themes and differentiators
 - Provide a roadmap to help the evaluator understand your plan
 - Narrative description of Activities and Methods
 - Ensure all elements of the statement of work are addressed
 - Level of detail varies by customer preferences
 - “Name Drop” past experiences where the approach was successful
 - Project Schedule



Financial Bids and Certifications

- Follow instructions carefully
- Do not alter forms in any way
- Do not add qualifications or assumptions (unless requested)
- Complete and sign forms as required
- Avoid bids at or close to the maximum budget
- Assess trade-offs between features and costs:
 - e.g. A feature gives you one extra point on the technical, but costs extra, and you lose 5 points on the financial



Proposal Tip: Use Action Caption for Graphics

- Action Captions
 - Link a key message to each graphic/picture you use.



Registration at Conference XYZ.



No hassle registration at Conference XYZ. Attendees at Conference XYZ were quickly whisked through registration, thanks to our innovative on-site registration system, leaving them with plenty of time to network with other conference attendees.

Managing the Proposal Effort

- **Project Charter**
 - Contains existing background on market, customer, competition and strategy
 - Names Proposal Manager or Management Team
 - Proposal Manager
 - Sales
 - Delivery
 - Defines Success





Managing the Proposal Effort

- Recommended Plan for successful on-time delivery:
 - Develop Proposal Shell as quickly as possible
 - Set targets for:
 - Solution Design, Team Selection, etc.
 - Section by Section due dates and Proposal first draft
 - Set firm deadlines for:
 - Final and Complete Draft
 - Proposal and Quality Assurance Reviews, Approvals
 - Printing and Delivery
 - Know your critical path and have contingency plans in place in case it is breached



Proposal Management Plan

- Opportunity Details
- Customer Profile
- Competitive Analysis
- Proposal Strategies and Themes
- Personnel Roles & Responsibilities
- Proposal Operations
- Attachments:
 - Schedule
 - Outline
 - Style Guide
 - Executive Summary
 - WBS and WBS Dictionary



Proposal Kick-Off Meeting

- Welcome and Introductions
- Team building exercise or briefing from senior management
- Opportunity Background
 - Client, Project Information, Win Themes, Competition
- Anticipated Solution
- Proposal Operations, Expectations, and Norms
- Schedule
- Questions and Answers



Responsibility Assignment Matrix

Item	Description	Points	Author	Owner	Due Date
1.0	Corporate Profile	100		JB	Mar 2
1.1	Years Experience	10	TT	JB	Feb 23
1.2	Description of Services	20	RZ	JB	Feb 23



Requirements Tracking Matrix

Item	Description	Owner	First Draft	Second Draft	Final
1.0	Corporate Profile	JB	✓		
1.1	Years Experience	JB	✓	✓	
1.2	Description of Services	JB	✓		



Managing the Document

- Access Control and Version Control
 - Document Control System
 - Single owner for master version
- Reviews
 - Green/Pink Team Reviews
 - Red/Gold Team Reviews
- RFP Amendments



Review, Finalize, and Submit the Proposal

- Re-read RFP and amendments
 - Verify against the proposal
 - Confirm the submission instructions
- Review the proposal
 - Scan the proposal
 - Proofread (including headers/footers)
 - Refresh all cross-references and table of contents
- Prepare and follow a publishing checklist
- Print and **Submit on Time!**



Après Proposal Activities

- Archiving the proposal
 - Ensure the final copy is identified and secured
- Create or update boilerplate library
 - Pull excerpts from proposal for future use
 - Cleanse content for easy tailoring in the future
- Collect lessons learned with project team
- Questions of clarification from the client
 - Understand why the question is being asked
 - Carefully consider your response
 - Respond promptly



Après Proposal Activities

- Presentations and Interviews
 - Understand the purpose and objectives
 - Ask for details (e.g. format, topics, questions)
 - Prepare and practice. Set-up a mock evaluation panel
- Request a debrief with the client
- At end of all company/personal projects:
 - Obtain reference, write project summary, and archive work products (Part of project closure – full circle)



Don't forget!

- Always Make a formal Bid-No Bid decision
- Ask questions of clarification when it can help your bid
- Develop a comprehensive proposal shell to enable the proposal team to focus on what is important
- #1 Objective of a proposal response:
 - Answer the Question!
- Use win themes and tools such as action captions to give your bid the edge

Thank you!

Questions?

**Keith Parker, Managing Director
The Proposal Centre**

(613) 482-0323
keith@theproposalcentre.ca
<http://www.theproposalcentre.ca>

@ProposalCentre (Twitter)
<http://theproposalcentre.wordpress.com> (Blog)