PROPOSAL DOS AND DON’TS

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AGENDA

• Pre-Solicitation
• Responding to the Solicitation
• Post Proposal Submission
• Quick Estimating System Overview
• Top Takeaways
PRE-SOLICITATION
PRE-RFP CAPTURE STRATEGY

• Best Practices
• Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)
• Relationship Assignments
• Thought Leadership
• Competition
• Past Performances
• Structure & Governance
• Questions to ask
BEST PRACTICES

- SWOT
- Win themes
- Differentiators
  - Technical Approach
  - Business Management Approach
  - Key Personnel
  - Pricing
- Features/Benefits/Proof Points
- Savings/Efficiencies/Value
- Client quotes
- Graphics
SWOT

• What is a SWOT Analysis?
  • **S** - Strengths
  • **W** - Weaknesses
  • **O** - Opportunities
  • **T** - Threats

• Strengths and weaknesses are internal factors, while opportunities and threats are external factors.

• Strengths and weaknesses mostly focus on the present, while opportunities and threats mostly focus on the future.
What *is* happening versus what *could* happen.
### SWOT

#### Strengths

- What do you do well?
- What is our competitive advantage?
- What do we do that no one else does?
- What resources do we have at our disposal?

- How can I leverage my strengths into opportunities?
- What new trends exist that I take advantage of?
- How can I radiate or increase profitability?

#### Weaknesses

- What are we bad at? What could we improve?
- What do our competitors do better than us?
- What do our clients complain about?
- What disadvantages does our team carry?
- Which resources are we lacking?

- What is your existing competition doing to unseat you/increase their Pwin?
- What other obstacles or threats exist that can harm you or hurt your Pwin chances?
- What are you competitors doing to ghost you and your chances?
## SWOT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Incumbent</td>
<td>• Innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• CPARS/Relationships</td>
<td>• Recruiting/Staffing/Retention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Insight Client Objectives</td>
<td>• Differentiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Expansion of Services</td>
<td>• Low Barrier to Entry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased ceiling</td>
<td>• Competitor Increased Since Last RFP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Possibility of Full &amp; Open</td>
<td>• Pricing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Opportunities**

- **Threats**

- **Low Barrier to Entry**
- **Competitor Increased Since Last RFP**
- **Pricing**
RELATIONSHIP ASSIGNMENTS

• Client
• Target Client
• Source Selection Committee (SSC)
• Contracting Office Representatives
• Competition
• Target Teaming Partners
THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

• Whitepapers
• Proposed Scope, Tasks and Recommendations
• Contract type
• Evaluation Criteria
• Acquisition options (GSA, PoP, size, NAICS, Best Value, et al…)
• Unique RFP requirements (e.g., CMMI Level 3, certain PPs, et al…)
• Unique Key Personnel requirements (e.g., Unicorns)
• Small Business considerations
COMPETITION

- Names
- SWOTs
- Potential Teaming Partners
- Ghosting
- P2W
- Black Hat
PAST PERFORMANCES

• Decide on which three (size, scope and relevancy)
• Prepare and strengthen templates NOW before RFP hits
• Tie to previous RFP (if appl), current needs and eventual RFP (it’s a process)
• Update CPARs NOW and incorporate to extent possible
• Proactively coordinate with COTR/COR beforehand
STRUCTURE & GOVERNANCE

• Conduct standing Pre-RFP capture meetings 6, 12, 18 months out dependent on size and acquisition lifecycle timeframe
• Assign Pre-RFP Capture Lead to drive process
• Assign and include less experienced staff (notes, action items, learning)
• Create standing agenda and have leads report on action item status
• Email meeting summary and updated actions immediately after
• Ensure prepared for Gate Review before RFP hits: Go/No-Go
QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

• Who is the client? Have we met with the client and acquisition team?
• Do we know the SSC? Acquisition strategy? Do we know who the influencers are? Have we met with them?
• Do we know what they want / hot buttons / concerns? Are they open to recommendations?
• Who is the incumbent? Competition? Their respective SWOT’s?
• Do we have all of our gaps filled? What can we do now to fill gaps?
• Do we have enough intelligence to properly assess whether we should be bidding on this opportunity and have a supportable Pwin?
RESPONDING TO THE PROPOSAL
RESPONDING TO THE SOLICITATION

Understanding the Solicitation Requirements

• Communications with the Government (RFI and Q&A)
• Ensure your understanding is the same as the Government’s
• Avoid Conflicts of Interest (COI)
RESPONDING TO THE SOLICITATION

Solicitation Compliance Matrix

• Make sure you get all the requirements covered

• Write with “one voice”
  • All response sections need to flow together
  • Tense and Grammar are important
  • Storyboarding and Outlines

• Provide Meaningful and Supportive Content
  • Do not parrot just back the solicitation
  • Solve the customer’s problems as stated in the solicitation
RESPONDING TO THE SOLICITATION

Solicitation Compliance Matrix

• Read the ENTIRE Solicitation

• Start Compliance Matrix with Sections L & M requirements then fill in with Section C Statement of Work; and

• Don’t overlook other Sections: Packages and Marking, Inspection and Acceptance, Deliveries or Performance, Contract Administration, Special Contract Requirements and the Clauses!
**RESPONDING TO THE SOLICITATION**

Compliance Matrix Sample:

Volume II Technical Proposal:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Solicitation Section</th>
<th>Solicitation Requirements</th>
<th>Page/Para</th>
<th>Proposal Section (L &amp; M)</th>
<th>Draft Pages allotted</th>
<th>Assigned Author</th>
<th>Assigned Reviewer</th>
<th>Date Draft Due</th>
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</thead>
</table>
RESPONDING TO THE SOLICITATION

Write with “one voice”

• Storyboards and Outlines get everyone on the same page, same path
• All response sections (Technical/Cost/Past Performance) need to flow together
• Answer the mail directly
• Tense, Grammar and Spelling are important
RESPONDING TO THE SOLICITATION

Provide Meaningful and Supportive Content

• Do not just parrot back the solicitation requirement, explain how you are going to accomplish the feat!
• Solve the customer’s problems as stated in the solicitation
• State the solution early in the paragraph, don’t make the reader hunt!
• Use simple wording and sentence structures, easy to read
• Use similar formatting in entire proposal, even resumes
• Avoid “Incumbent-itis”
RESPONDING TO THE SOLICITATION

Proposal Review Process

• **Green Team**
  – Typically a review of initial rough draft of both the Technical and Cost proposals
  – Includes Basis of Estimate (BOE) and pricing methodologies used

• **Red Team**
  – Typically a detailed review of the refined draft to ensure all aspects of the solicitation are included in the proposal (compliance matrix)
  – Reviews corrections made from Green Team review

• **Gold Team**
  – Typically the final review by upper management just prior to submission
  – Can include “TINA Sweep” if required
RESPONDING TO THE SOLICITATION

Cost Narrative Response

• Use same formatting as Technical Response
• Talk to Basis of Estimate (BOE) used and be specific as to cost data
• Explain rational, calculations and methodologies used for BOE
POST PROPOSAL SUBMISSION
15.302 – Source selection objective

- “The objective of source selection is to select the proposal that represents the best value.”
- This does not preclude LPTA hence why we still see it (See our April 2019 Lunch and Learn for more information)
THE SOURCE SELECTION TEAM

Source Selection Authority (SSA) shall:

– Establish evaluation teams
– Approve source selection strategy
– Ensure consistency among requirements, notices, proposal preparation instructions, evaluation factors, solicitation provisions, and data requirements
– Ensure proposals are evaluated solely on factors in the solicitation
– Consider recommendations of advisory boards/panels
– Make source selection
THE SOURCE SELECTION TEAM

Source Selection Authority

Source Selection Evaluation Board

Technical Team
Past Performance Team
Cost Team
Security Team
HOW THE GOVERNMENT EVALUATES A PROPOSAL

What Evaluators Should/Should NOT be Doing:

• They should NOT evaluate or compare proposals against one another during the initial evaluation. They must be evaluated individually against the evaluation factors in the contract.

• They SHOULD ensure that it is clear how your comment relates to the evaluation factor.

• They should NOT make assumptions.

• Evaluate the text in the proposal. (Don’t rely on personal experience or hearsay from others)
What Evaluators Should/Should NOT be Doing (cont.):

• They SHOULD look carefully at the text in the proposal that may include statements and/or assumptions that could indicate increased cost/price and/or risk to the Government.

• They SHOULD give each proposal the same consideration up front.

• The name of the offeror should NOT influence (positively or negatively) the evaluator’s comments or ratings, except when evaluating past performance.

• They SHOULD document your reasoning for any potential increased risk to the Government on the evaluation form for the Contracting Officer’s review.
HOW IS COST EVALUATED

• Realism
• Reasonableness
• Completeness
• Like Technical, must follow Section M instructions!
• Development of a “Should Cost”
WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Clarifications

– Communications prior to competitive range determination
– NOT to be used to correct deficiencies/revise proposal
– May address adverse past performance
– Explain ambiguities
– Competitive Range
– Exchanges after competitive range determination
– Negotiations/Discussions
– Corrections of deficiencies/revision of proposal (BAFO)
## FAR 15.3 – SOURCE SELECTION

### Competitive Range Determination Example

Budget is $30,000,000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contractor</th>
<th>Tech Strengths</th>
<th>Tech Weaknesses</th>
<th>Past Performance</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hughes Don't Lose</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keystone Kehoe</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 Adverse Past Perf</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shapiro Heroes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Soles Source Consulting</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>$32,819,912</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wacky Wild Williamson</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>$24,002,945</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
POST SUBMISSION DO NOT’S

• Bother the Contracting Officer or anyone else on the evaluation teams with questions about progress
• Submit additional information when not requested
• Discard any information used to construct the proposal
AWARD ANNOUNCEMENT

• Get a Debriefing no matter what!

• You can learn:
  • Weaknesses/Deficiencies in the proposal
  • Cost or price and technical rating (if used) of the winner compared to the contractor being debriefed
  • Overall ranking of all offerors (if used)
  • Summary of the rationale for award
  • Q&A regarding source selection procedures – Don’t be shy!
IF I LOSE, I SHOULD PROTEST, RIGHT?

• Covered in FAR Part 33
• A protest is a challenge to an alleged impropriety in a solicitation or other procurement error that prejudices the protester.

• Protests may be filed with:
  – The procuring agency
  – The GAO
  – U.S. Court of Federal Claims

• Timing Matters! (Generally within 10 days within award)
  – Pre-award protests may preclude an award announcement
  – Post-award protests may stay an award already made
PROTESTS CAN BE WON

Some Commonly Upheld Protests include:

- Unstated Evaluation Criteria
- Waived or Relaxed Requirements
- Some unreasonable evaluations/source selection decisions
- Errors in decisions made must be objectively clear
- Insufficient Documentation

In Government Fiscal Year 2019, GAO’s effectiveness rate (e., the rate at which the protester obtained some relief either as a result of voluntary agency corrective action or GAO sustaining the protest) was 44%.
THERE'S A GUIDE FOR THAT

United States Government Accountability Office

GAO

Office of the General Counsel

May 2018
(Tenth Edition)

BID PROTESTS AT GAO:

A Descriptive Guide
ESTIMATING SYSTEM ELEMENTS

1. Policy and Procedures
   • Address DFARS and DCAA requirements
   • Provide for Management Reviews and Oversight
2. Training
   • Appropriate for types of costs that are to be estimated
   • Minimum of annual training
3. Documentation
   • Management reviews/approvals of estimates
   • Provides documentation of price/cost in response to solicitations
   • Provides details on where price/cost was obtained and why it was used
4. Internal Review/Audit
   • Ensures system is working and provides reliable estimates
ESTIMATING FILE

MORE THAN JUST THE PROPOSAL

- Copy of Solicitation or Modification
- Bid/No-Bid or Gate Review Form
- Initial Basis of Estimate (BOE)
  - Direct Labor/Hours, Subcontracts, Materials, ODCs, Indirect Rates
- Price Review Form with Approval Signature
- Final, Updated BOE with approvals
- Final Cost Submission with supporting documentation, including:
  - Price Summary Schedule (by cost element)
  - Direct Labor (in FAR Table 15-2 format and mapped to solicitation format)
- Post submission updates
BEST PRACTICE – TOP TAKEAWAYS

Pre-Solicitation

• Do your SWOT!
• How well do you know the customer and how well do they know you?
• What’s your win theme and how will you demonstrate it in your proposal?
• Be disciplined in executing Pre-RFP actions
• Complete gate process before bidding
BEST PRACTICES

Solicitation Response

• Understand the solicitation (read it and ask questions)
• Create a solicitation compliance matrix
• Write with one voice
BEST PRACTICES

Post Proposal Submission

• Leave the evaluation team alone unless it asks questions.
• Don’t try to throw in extra, unrequested information when questions are asked.
• Get a debriefing no matter what!
• Protest smartly, if at all.
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