

EXECUTIVE BRIEF

Ultimate guide to the RFP response process



Introduction

Modern proposal teams invest so much time in government contracting. Winning these contracts can take a lot of time and effort, but the rewards are great: think long-term, profitable relationships with reliable government partners.

You need a strong RFP response process to give your team the best chance of winning the contract. Using [VT Docs](#) can help you respond to RFPs faster and with greater accuracy at all stages of the RFP Process so you can win more bids.

There are many opportunities for organizations in government contracting. But the RFP (requests for proposal) response process can seem overwhelming. And if you're a smaller business, you may feel that you can't throw your hat in the ring. Which means that businesses who could be enjoying long-term, profitable relationships with a reliable government customer lose out on potential opportunities.

But there is hope. Whether you're new to government contracting, want to improve your win rate, or gain more lucrative contracts, the secret to pitching for and winning this business is to create an excellent RFP response process.





What is an RFP response process?

The RFP response process is a defined, repeatable, streamlined set of steps you follow in order to determine which RFP you'll go for and how you'll prepare your submission. Once it's standardized and field-tested, it can be followed by anyone who needs to step into the role of proposal manager. This scalable solution can improve your chances of winning your next (or first) government contract.

Having a defined process in place can also ease the pain of that first encounter with the RFP, whether it's in draft form or final form. RFPs can run to hundreds of pages with a vast array of requirements. But with your RFP response process in place, you can immediately start zeroing in on the responsibilities, roles, and timelines that you'll need to meet.





Understand the 8 basic steps in any RFP response process

To get started, here are eight key steps to take to craft a solid RFP response:

1. Is this RFP worth a response?

First, you'll need to qualify this opportunity. There's no point in wasting time and resources on a bid [if you can't meet compliance requirements or the capabilities of your subcontractors](#), or if it holds other unacceptable risks. Resist the urge to make a quick assessment based on gut instinct.

Have dispassionate scoring criteria to hand that you've agreed with colleagues and use them consistently to make a bid/no-bid decision. These criteria may include past relationship with the issuer, similar successful work in your track record, delivery timescales, and any red flags in the RFP that may indicate there's a preferred bidder already in pole position to win this contract.

2. Assemble your team and begin

The next big step in your process is to gather your proposal team. You'll need buy-in from senior management, so make sure their support is visible, and you'll need to have identified your key Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) whose help you'll need to write the first and subsequent drafts of the proposal. Have your roadmap and delivery timeline ready and make sure everyone is focussed on it. An RFP response process flow chart is useful for teams to follow to keep everyone on track.



3. Assign segments of work to SMEs

How will you put meat on the bones of your first draft proposal? You need to divide the document into sections that you'll assign to your SMEs, pricing people, the recruitment and HR team, and so on. Regardless of the size of your organization, this division of labor lets you get the best from all contributors as they focus on what they do best.

Two organizational tools that will help are:

- The [compliance matrix](#). A table that you've built based on the RFP, listing each requirement it lays out.
- The [responsibility matrix](#). A table that states who's responsible for different parts of the process or inputs.

Generating a compliance matrix early in your RFP response process helps keep your focus on the customer's requirements as you write. You'll also use the compliance matrix later on, to double-check you've delivered everything the RFP requested.

4. Write a first draft of the RFP response

The first draft of your RFP response will give a sense of how capable you are of meeting the requirements outlined in the RFP, so you can begin assigning tasks and sections to relevant proposal team members. Even at this stage, your draft proposal should give a sense of your [win themes](#): compelling reasons why your organization should be awarded this work over any other bidder. Those reasons will be a North Star for you and the whole team, so everyone remains consistent and focused on why you should win.



5. Complete a second draft and ask for reviews

At this point in your process, the input you've gathered from experts means you have a second draft which tells a clear, cohesive story about why you should win. But is it compelling enough? Does it really comply with the customer's requirements? Have you given a complete response without any verbal padding or mysterious acronyms that could make the proposal difficult to understand?

Your review teams will help you answer these questions, and you'll be able to improve the proposal using their feedback, including a reality check on whether the pricing for this job is both realistic and profitable.

6. Write the final proposal

Your final proposal is complete, compliant, and compelling. It provides all the material required by the RFP and tells a clear story about why choosing your organization will deliver the best outcome.

You've cross-referenced your final proposal with your compliance matrix to ensure that no requirements were missed, and your matrix shows the reader where in the document they should look to see that you've met the requirements they laid out.

Your completed RFP response also contains a list of acronyms used and your final read-through shows that all acronyms are easy to understand in context for any outsider who reads your document for the first time.



7. Submit your RFP response and think of the future

Submitting your RFP response isn't the end of the process. Keep a copy of your response and use it, along with other RFP responses you or your colleagues have written, to create a knowledge base for the future. Each RFP response should be stored in a way that the content you spent so much time creating can be consulted later.

From profiles of subcontractors to pricing models, your proposal contains highly polished nuggets of information that might need refreshing if you intend to re-use them, but they can still save time and make it much faster for you to reach the first-draft stage for the next proposal. This content library will also help you to make future bid/no-bid decisions (or go/no-go decisions) faster and in a more informed way.

8. Learn from the past, including rejected proposals

The content you create for an RFP response has significant intrinsic value: not just because it can be re-used for a future proposal, but because you can analyze it for insights if you don't succeed in winning this contract. Failure to secure the work after so much effort can be disappointing, but it's a chance to learn. Each bid is also a chance to improve your RFP response process itself: where were the gaps in your process? Are there manual tasks you could automate to save time and meet the next deadline more easily?



Automate the RFP response process for greater efficiency

Tools that can [automate parts of the RFP response process](#) are the best friend of any time-pressed proposal manager. The deadline to answer an RFP is never quite far enough in the future to let the proposal team be confident of meeting it, so how can you save time without sacrificing quality in your response?

[VT Docs integrates into every step in the RFP response process](#) to automate tasks and improve your focus on what matters:

- Make a bid/no-bid decision faster by using VT Docs to compare current opportunities to past responses to find reusable content. Have you read a draft RFP before the final was published? [VT Docs does a fast line-by-line comparison](#) to allow you to see the differences, if any, between the draft and final solicitation.
- Once you've decided to go for an opportunity, [VT Docs can rapidly analyze the full content of the RFP and generate a compliance matrix](#)—one of the most time-consuming parts of any RFP response process. VT Docs can shred a proposal and generate a compliance matrix in a matter of minutes. This close, accurate analysis of the document can make it easier to generate your responsibility matrix and send the relevant sections of an RFP to the right people responsible (such as pricing, subcontractors and so on), saving everyone time.
- Do a faster, more efficient copy edit of your RFP response with VT Docs, which lets you pinpoint long sentences, passive voice, undefined acronyms or other [readability issues](#). Any reluctance or pushback from review teams about their writing style can also be easier to manage with an impartial tool like VT Docs, which highlights areas of poor readability and makes suggestions on how to improve. A clearly written RFP response helps clients understand your proposal on first read and makes you look more professional.



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Responding to a proposal request can be challenging, but with the right RFP proposal automation software, like VT Docs, and a structured, organized approach from the beginning, your business can streamline your RFP response process and significantly improve your win rate.

You need the right software to create compelling proposals. Shred your first doc in VT Docs and find out first-hand how VisibleThread can enhance your proposal process.

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- Identify and shred critical FARs/DFARs and flow-down clauses
- Ensure alignment on Win Themes
- Remove ambiguity & confusion
- Ensure compliance by spotting gaps & risks
- Reduce 'scope creep' in RFP/bid responses

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Patricia A Fieldson,
Manager / Capture Advancement Team,
Collins Aerospace

