RFP

Ebook

# The Ultimate Guide to RFPs

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Modern proposal teams invest so much time in government contracting and responding to RFPs (Request for Proposals). 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.

Are you new to Government Contracting? Perhaps you want to improve your win rate, or gain more lucrative contracts? Either way, we have the secret to pitching for and winning more business. It all starts with creating the perfect RFP (Requests For Proposal) response process.

We have clients who want to cultivate profitable relationships with reliable government partners in the long term. Others want to win more contracts in the short-term. The common thread throughout is the need for the right software to create compelling proposals. Simply put...

## VT Docs = Faster/More accurate RFPs + Process Enhancement throughout.

In short, if you're reading this to land more bids, then you're in the right place. So, without further ado, let's get started!

# Enhancing your RFP process

The RFP response process can be daunting – even for those at the forefront of government contracting. If you're a smaller business, the prospect of getting involved can be completely overwhelming (at best).

The result of this off-putting ordeal? Businesses, like yours – who could be enjoying long-term profitable relationships with reliable government customers – are missing out.

Before we outline our ultimate 8-point plan, let's first define the Requests For Proposal response process.

# What is an RFP response process?

The RFP response process is a defined, repeatable, streamlined set of steps. If you follow these 8 steps meticulously, you can determine your best-suited RFP. They will also help you prepare your submission.

Once standardized and field-tested, this process can be followed by anyone who needs to step into the role of a proposal manager. This scalable solution can improve your chances of winning your next/first government contract.

Having a defined process in place eases the pain of that first encounter with the RFP in draft or final form. Be aware: RFPs can run to hundreds of pages with an array of requirements. But with your RFP response process in place, you can start zeroing in on a number of things. These include the responsibilities, roles, and timelines that you'll need to meet.

# The 8 basic steps in any RFP response process

You read that right, any RFP response. Crafting a solid response to each RFP doesn't have to be a mammoth tailored task. For instance, you mightn't even bother pursuing certain proposal opportunities in the first place.

## 1. Is every RFP worth a response?

First and foremost – you must qualify each opportunity. Sometimes, there's no point in wasting time or resources on certain bids. For example, **you should skip a bid if:**

1. You can't meet the compliance requirements

2. It's beyond the capabilities of your subcontractors

3. If it holds other unacceptable risks

   Seeing if this is the case takes consideration. In other words, you should resist the urge to make a quick assessment based on gut instinct. Instead, you should employ an entirely dispassionate scoring criteria to see outcomes clearly.

   Your colleagues should be onboard with this criteria, using them consistently to make a bid/no-bid decision. As for what they might look like? Such criteria can include the following:

4. A previous relationship with the issuer

5. Similar successful work within your track record

6. Delivery timescales

7. Any prior red flags in the RFP. These may indicate there's a preferred bidder already in pole position to win this contract

## 2. Assemble your team and begin

If you're getting Avengers vibes, that's encouraged – specifically when gathering your proposal team. Beforehand, you'll need buy-in from senior management, so make sure their support is visible.

You must also identify your key Subject Matter Experts (SMEs). Their help is paramount when penning the first and subsequent drafts of the proposal.

Also, have your roadmap and delivery timeline ready, ensuring everyone is laser focused on it. By way of a visual guide, use an RFP response process flow chart. These are very useful for teams to follow, keeping everyone on track.

## 3. Assign segments of work to SMEs

So, how will you put meat on the bones of your first draft proposal? Firstly, divide the document into sections. Then, you'll assign it to your SMEs, pricing people, the recruitment and HR team, etc.

Regardless of the size of your organization, this division of labor is crucial. Why? Because it enables you to get the best from all your contributors, all while they focus on their expertise.

**Two central organizational tools that will help here are:**

- The Compliance Matrix. A table that you have built based on the RFP, listing each requirement it lays out.

- The Responsibility Matrix. This table states who's responsible for different parts of the process, or inputs.

Generating an easily accessible Compliance Matrix, early in your RFP response process, is key. It helps keep you centered on the customer's requirements as you write. You will also use this matrix later on – to double-check you've delivered everything the requested RFP.

## 4. Write a first draft of the RFP response

We're halfway through our guide, and now you're ready to write your first draft. This will give a sense of how capable you are of meeting the requirements outlined in the RFP.

Then, you can begin assigning tasks and sections to your relevant proposal team members. Even at this stage, your draft proposal should indicate your win themes, as outlined by our CEO and founder, Fergal McGovern. These are the reasons why you're the optimum fit for this bid – over any other bidder.

These themes will be a guiding light for you and your team. They'll keep everyone consistently fixed on how, and why, you should win.

## 5. Complete a second draft and request reviews

At this point in the process, the input you've gathered from experts means you have a second draft. Sure, it provides 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 verbose padding or confusing acronyms, rendering it tricky to comprehend?

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

## 6. Write the final proposal

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

At this stage, you've cross-referenced your final proposal with your compliance matrix, ensuring no requirements were missed. Meanwhile, your matrix shows the reader exactly where you've met their requirements within the document.

Your completed RFP response will also contain a list of acronyms used, outlining their context and function. This way, any outsider who reads your document will understand them first time around.

## 7. Submit your RFP response and prep for the future

Submitting your RFP response obviously isn't the end of the process, rather the beginning.

Of course, you'll keep a copy of this response for reference, along with other RFPs you/your colleagues have written. This will create a knowledge based library for the future.

From profiles of subcontractors to pricing models, your proposal contains highly polished nuggets of information. While it will require updating if you intend to re-use these nuggets, it will still save time. This will make it much faster for you to reach the first-draft stage for the next proposal.

This content library will help you make future bid/no-bid decisions faster, and in a more informed way.

## 8. Learn rejected proposals

The content you create for an RFP response has significant intrinsic value. This is true even if it doesn't result in a win. Not only can it be re-used for future proposals, it can be analyzed for insights to aid future success.

Failure to secure the work after so much effort can be disappointing, but consider it a chance to learn. Each bid is also an opportunity to improve your RFP response process itself:

1. Where were the gaps in your process?

2. Are there manual tasks you could automate to save time, meeting the next deadline more easily?

# Automating 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 file an RFP is never adequate to let the proposal team be confident of meeting it. So, it's up to you to define how can you save time without sacrificing quality in your response.

VT Docs integrates into every step in the RFP response process. It automates tasks and improves your focus on what matters, such as:

- Making a bid/no-bid decision faster. Using VT Docs, you can compare current opportunities to past responses to find reusable content. Need to read a draft RFP before the final is published? VT Docs does a fast line-by-line comparison highlighting any differences between the draft and final solicitation.

- Once you've decided to pursue an opportunity, VT Docs can rapidly analyze the full content of the RFP. It then generates a compliance matrix – one of the most time- consuming parts of any RFP response process.

  Additionally, VT Docs can shred a proposal and generate a compliance matrix in a matter of minutes. This tight, accurate analysis of the document makes it easier to generate your responsibility matrix. In turn, you can send the relevant sections of an RFP to the right people responsible (such as pricing, subcontractors, etc.), saving everyone time.

- Creating a faster, more efficient copy edit of your RFP response with VT Docs lets you pinpoint pesky readability issues. These include long sentences, passive voice, undefined acronyms, or other readability issues. Which we highlight further here.

Experiencing reluctance or pushback from review teams about their writing style? VisibleThread brings impartiality thanks to tools like VT Docs. It highlights areas of poor readability and makes suggestions on how to improve.

In short, a clearly written RFP response helps clients understand your proposal on first read and making it look more professional.

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# Your Ultimate Guide to the RFP response process – Conclusion

Responding to a proposal request is challenging enough. However, 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.

Why not start your journey and enhance your VT Docs expertise by taking our **free skill-building module course** in VT University.



Whitepaper

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