

Fundamentals of Effective Proposal Development

Organizing and Executing for
Excellence in the Proposal Process

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Areas of Opportunity for the Academic Community



- NIST Technology Innovation Program (TIP)
 - *Successor to the Advanced Technology Program, with some new twists*

<http://www.nist.gov/tip/>

...and

http://www.nist.gov/tip/comp_09/comp09_kit.html

“...supports, promotes, and accelerates innovation through high-risk, high-reward research in areas of critical national need. TIP has the agility and flexibility to make targeted investments in transformational R&D that will ensure our Nation’s future through sustained technological leadership.”

Areas of Opportunity for the Academic Community (cont.)



- **Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) programs**
 - *Supported by multiple agencies – DoD, DOE, NSF, DOC, NOAA...*
 - *Administered by NSF*
- **But, both SBIR and STTR are programs for small businesses**
 - *Academic institutions cannot prime, but can be on teams*

<http://www.sbir.gov/>

<http://floridasbdc.org/SpecialPrograms/technology.asp>

<http://www.eflorida.com/ContentSubpage.aspx?id=872#>

Some Observations on TIPs, ATPs, SBIRs, etc.



- Sponsor agencies are swamped with proposals
 - *90% of them are simply gosh-awful*
 - *P_w for the typical proposal is <5%*
- So, what makes a winner in these types of competitions?
 - 1. A great idea, with significant potential (and credible) impact*
 - 2. A clear path to delivering that impact (i.e., a usable product at the end of the road)*
 - 3. A research plan that focuses the time and \$\$ on cracking the tough nuts*
 - 4. Clearly expert understanding of the technical problem and the solution space*
 - 5. Credible credentials*
 - 6. Checking all the boxes for required content*
 - 7. An easy read – clear, concise, focused, and on-point*
 - 8. Strong leverage that multiplies the value of the funding*
 - 9. A good relationship with the solicitation sponsor*

The Basic Steps of Proposal Development



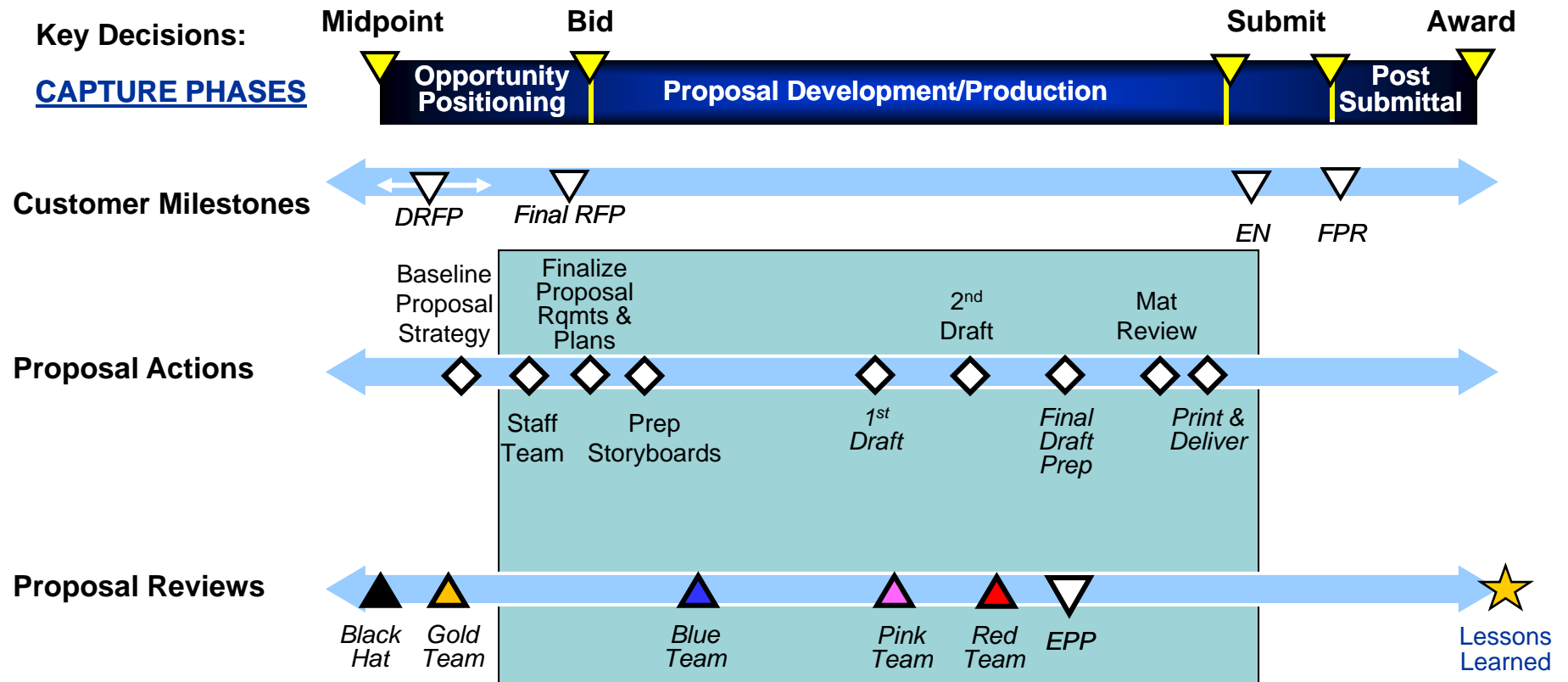
Lay the Foundation

- 1. Understand the Customer, the Requirements, and what it takes to WIN**
- 2. Staff for success**
- 3. Baseline “the Story” – Value Propositions, Win Themes, and Discriminators**

Execute the Process

- 1. RFP & Kickoff**
- 2. Blue Team**
- 3. Pink Team**
- 4. Red Team**
- 5. Mat Review**
- 6. Final Print & Deliver**
- 7. Post-Submittal**

The Basic Proposal Process



Lay the Foundation: Understand the Customer and the Requirements



- **Do the homework!**
 - *Understand the customer, mission, organization and source selection strategy*
 - *Understand the customer requirements, needs, wants, and preferences*
 - The end user is only part of the customer set
 - *Understand the players in the space*
 - Competitors...or partners???
 - *Build the relationships to shape the game in advance of the RFP*
 - Influence the requirements through pre-RFP interactions and outreach
 - Understand what drives each change as the requirements evolve...is the customer listening to us, or is someone else in the driver's seat?

Baselining the Story:



- **Value Propositions**
 - *What are we giving the customer?*
 - *How are we giving it to them?*
 - *What's the quantifiable benefit or impact?*
- **Win Themes**
 - *Position us vs. the competition*
 - Low-tech, low cost?
 - High-tech with superior performance/best value?
 - Lowest risk?
 - Proven performance?
 - Early delivery or other bonus features?
- **Discriminators**
 - *Those attributes that are **UNIQUE** to our solution or team*
 - *Must fill in the blank: **ONLY** our team...*
 - *Must be something the customer values*

***Value Propositions, Win Themes, and
Discriminators Define the Proposal***

Got an RFP Yet?



- **Customer may or may not have issued a full draft or a final RFP before Blue team**
 - *If not, storyboarding is deferred or kept at very high level*
 - *Blue Team likely not productive, because we don't know what the customer will require*
- **With a reasonably solid draft RFP, the team can proceed with proposal development**
 - *Core team lays the foundation*
 - *Generate draft Executive Summary to document the story and the strategy*
 - *Domain SMEs on board only as needed to work critical issues*

What's in an RFP?



- **Section A:** Solicitation (SF-1423, -1447, etc.)
- **Section B:** Supplies/Services (CLINs/Deliverables)
- **Section C:** Statement of Work
- **Section D:** Packaging & Marking
- **Section E:** Inspection & Acceptance
- **Section F:** Deliveries/Performance
- **Section G:** Contract Admin
- **Section H:** Special Contract Requirements
- **Section I:** Contract Clauses
- **Section J:** Attachments (CDRLs, specs, etc.)
- **Section K:** Representations & Certifications
- **Section L:** Proposal Preparation Instructions
- **Section M:** Evaluation Criteria

RFP Release and Kickoff



- **When the RFP arrives:**
 - *Core team and SME review to assess the requirements and identify issues/questions that affect the bid strategy or mechanics*
 - *Requirements stripped and processed to generate*
 - **Proposal Outline**
 - **Initial Compliance Matrix**
 - **Section Lead Writing Assignments**
 - **Updated Value Propositions/Win Package**
- **Convene the Core Team for Kickoff, and get going**

The Proposal Kickoff



- **Conduct within ~2 days of final RFP receipt**
- **Cover:**
 - *Proposal/program scope and schedule*
 - *Synopsis of RFP highlights*
 - *Overview of win strategy and approaches*
 - *Key issues*
 - *Lead roles and functional assignments*
 - *Outline, writing assignments, compliance maps*
 - *Proposal process, tools, and conventions*
 - *Action items*
 - *Storyboard kickoff*

Objective: Give everyone the information they need to understand what needs doing and how to do it

The Proposal Outline



- **MUST track EXACTLY to the RFP instructions – even if they don't make sense**
- **Keep it at the highest possible level – the more chunks you make, the harder it is to integrate the story**
- **Every section has a lead author and a page budget**
- **Allocate pages based on evaluation weight**
- **Allocate 85% of page count – goal is to submit LESS**

Proposal Outline & Author Assignments

Volume/Section	Author	Page Budget
Volume 1 – Exec Summary	Hyde	66
Volume 2 – Technical Approach	Campbell	1,100
Part 1 – Performance Work Statement (PWS)	Kelley	100
Part 2 – Training Effectiveness	Spang	40
2.1 Training Plan	Spang	100
2.2 ISD Plan	Spang	50
2.3 Instructor Certification Plan	Spang	20
Part 3 – Management	Torla	45
3.1 IMP/IMS	Kelley	60
3.2 SEMP	Williams	100
3.3 CM Plan	Williams	50
3.4 LC Mgt Plan	Williams	50
3.5 HR Plan	Jessum	25
3.6 Relocation Plan	Rosack	10
3.7 Transition Plan	Rosack	25
3.8 QA Plan	Marks	25
3.9 Security Plan	Marks	10
Part 4 – Contractor Logistics Support (CLS)	Williams	30
4.1 CLS Plan	Williams	100
4.2 Software Development Plan	Williams	100
Part 5 – Mission Understanding	Appler	10
5.1 UH-1N Upgrades	Rosack	75
5.2 AC-130U SIOF	Rosack	25
Part 6 – DBGS and DMO	H. Black	25
Part 7 – Risk Mgt/Matrix	Appler	25
Volume 3 – Cost/Price	Butner	100
Volume 4 – Contracts	Phillips	250
Volume 5 – Past Performance	Burrell	50

Blue Team



- An in-depth review of Value Propositions and technical/management solution approaches by key SMEs/execs
- Provides an independent review of the top-level story
- Are we telling the story in the right and best way?
- Are we answering the mail in response to the customer's requirements, preferences, and hot buttons?

Keys to Success:

- *Value Propositions are clearly articulated*
- *Storyboards are kept at the right level – stay out of the weeds*
- *Early focus on the designing and maturing the key “anchor” graphics*
- *Review team needs to be strategic thinkers, not box-checkers*

Lays the foundation and calibrates authors

First Draft Prep



- The “Gold Standard” is for the bulk of the proposal to be authored by the Core Team, with help as needed from SMEs
- Focus on “threading” the top-level story throughout the proposal
- Focus on the anchor graphics

Pink Team



- **The first formal review of the all-up proposal draft**
- **Reviewers don their “customer hats” and evaluate the proposal just like the customer**
 - *Formal scoring against the Evaluation Criteria*
 - *Write up CRs and DRs for any noncompliance, inadequacy, or other issue*

Keys to Success:

- *All volumes complete, edited, and pre-audited*
- *All volumes structured in strict compliance with RFP instructions*
- *No holes or omissions*
- *Review team members pre-assigned to every section, with senior SMEs*
- *2 or three reviewers assigned to every section*

Objective is to score “ALL GREEN”

CR/DR Sheet



Clarification Request/Deficiency Report	
EN Type (Check One): Clarification Request <input type="checkbox"/>	
Deficiency Report <input type="checkbox"/>	
Volume:	_____
Section:	_____
Page #:	_____
Explanation of Deficiency or Required Clarification	
1.	
Corrective Action Required/Recommended	
1.	

Draft 2 Prep



- **Resolve and fix the Pink Team comments**
- **Refine and polish the graphics, the messages, and the story**
- **Ensure all the blocks are checked on RFP compliance**
- **At this point the “helper” authors should be rolled off**
 - *All final polishing is done by the Core Team, with SME support as needed*
- **End product for Red Team should be “submittal ready”**

Red Team



- The final “external” review of the proposal
- Exact same rules and rigor as Pink Team
 - *Evaluate just like the customer*
 - *Provide evaluation scores and CRs/DRs*

Keys to Success:

- *All volumes complete, edited, and pre-audited by the Core Team to ensure proposal draft is ready for formal review*
- *All volumes audited against accepted Pink Team findings*
- *No holes or omissions*
- *Review team members pre-assigned to every section, with senior SMEs as Factor/Subfactor leads*
- *2 or three reviewers assigned to every section*
- *Schedule Red Teams for larger proposals for 2 full days to allow in-depth, thoughtful review*

Objective is to score “ALL BLUE”

Mat Review



- The final read-through and cleanup of the proposal prior to printing
- Audit to ensure all Red Team issues worked off
- All volumes are PERFECT and ready to print

Keys to Success:

- *All Core Team members must review and sign off*
- *Add one or two “uncontaminated” external checkers*
- *All issues are resolved and fixed on the spot*
- *All corrections double-proofed*
- *All cross-references, dependencies, and facts double-checked across the volumes*
- *Final audit against RFP to ensure ALL the details are right – including adherence to page limits, accuracy of pricing data*

Final Print and Delivery



- **Allow minimum of 24 hours for final printing, book checks, CD prep, and packaging & labeling**
- **For larger proposals, volumes should be waterfalled in over 2-3 (or more) days**
- **Always plan for primary + “deadman” delivery via alternate routes (e.g., courier + Fedex)**
- **All deliverable copies must be book-checked to ensure proper assembly**

Keys to Success:

- *All volumes double-checked BEFORE rolling the presses*
- *Keep it simple – deliver what the customer requested, in the form and format required*
- *Keep some slack in the production schedule to accommodate late-breaking changes/problems*

Post-Submittal



- **Customer Evaluation Notices (ENs)**
 - *May start showing up VERY quickly...or not at all*
 - *ENs are your chance to:*
 - **Get Well (fix a deficiency or weakness)**
 - **Close the Deal**
 - *EN responses MUST be “red teamed”*
 - **Do we understand the questions underlying the questions?**
 - **Are we giving not just a right answer, but the BEST answer – the one that DELIGHTS the customer?**
- **FPRs and BAFOs**
 - *Typically used to:*
 - **Drive price down**
 - **Clarify approaches, solutions, and commitments**
 - **Ensure proposal is fully executable, incorporating all post-submittal changes, EN responses, corrections**

Final Thoughts



- **Agility and flexibility are key – no proposal plan ever survives contact with reality**
- **The process is only as good as the people executing it**
- **No proposal is perfect – but perfection is always the goal, the vision, and the requirement**

“We have met the enemy, and they are us!”

Questions?