

EFFECTIVE PROPOSAL WRITING:

Making Your Words
Impact Reviewers



Effective Proposal Writing: Making Your Words Impact Reviewers

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Someone that has never won a proposal cannot really teach a course on the theory and application of proposal writing. It's that simple. This is a learned skill as much as a practice. And most engineers and scientists discount the value of proposal writing; they learn economics and practice project budgets; but you don't have a budget to work with until you have a project. And project funding is scarce, and getting scarcer every year. With inflation, the pool of money for most research is reduced in value year over year. That means only best will continue to get the most money year over

year.

Proposal writing is competitive process, and the competition pools gets larger every year.

Since proposal writing is a learned skill, the only way to get better is to learn an effective process, jump right in and write some. Rejection is also a learned skill. Think of it this way, your first attempt may kill two birds with one stone.

Here is the basic truth: whether you like it or not you cannot not do serious science and engineering without winning a project proposal competition, at some time in your life. And if you want to reach the higher levels of management this skill will be an essential one for

senior management.

This microbook lays out a tried and true process to follow, the principles that you should consider, and gives some of my successful examples to prove that I have the *bona fides* to back up my claims.

And if winning project contracts is an important prerequisite for an author claiming to know how to do it, I also setup contract proposals to tender and mark bidders. So I have experience on both sides of the process working through and reviewing what is important in a bid.

Whether you are writing for an open competition, a tender to bid on a contract, or your boss wants you to plan out/forecast office activities for the next

quarter or year, they all require the same things: they all require an outline plan or design, they require a budget, a people allocation, and time line. What sets the good ones from the bad ones isn't how many degrees you have on the wall or how many people are in your company; it's how well you understand what your client is asking you to do and how well you get to the point explaining what you are proposing but also how beneficial your plan is. So that's the core of what you should propose. Nothing more, nothing less.

Other things like technical trivia, rants, diversions, history, complaints, criticisms of the requesting tender, and other nonsense not helpful and distracting in a

bid is what losers spend most of their time on. This is what a reviewer will consider as fluff, and a waste of time. Remember, a reviewer has minimal time and if you waste their time your proposal will suffer as well. ***Secret number # 1*** is that reviewers favor those that make their job the easiest. Common sense, right?

Most technical people think that demonstrating facts is the key to winning. It isn't the critical factor but it is part of it certainly. The critical factor is you demonstrate how WELL you understand the requirements. If you understand what is important to meet the need, then the technology can be met many ways. But if you don't know why you are proposing a technology - like many companies that

have a canned solution and want to sell it - then how can a review have confidence you will do the job? If you outline and understand the risks associated with the problem and your proposed plan, then you give the reviewers' confidence that you know what might happen and you are prepared for dealing with any eventuality.

Like proposals I have written, this book is a simple straightforward proposal.

If you accept the preceding ideas then you are ready to get to the heart of the book and learn successful proposal writing.

See, wasn't that easy? If you are reading this sentence then my first proposal was successful, I laid out the importance of

my plan, made it easy to approach the subject, didn't waste your time going on and on, and gave you some helpful advice on proposals.

Read Chapter 2 for a review of an effective proposal process. Chapter 3 lays out the key proposal principals to consider that are not prescriptive - they don't tell you what to write - but descriptive in they help your thinking / brainstorming about what kinds of things are effective in a proposal. Chapter 4 in the premium version of this book outlines some successful proposals - funded up to \$1.7 million - that I wrote. It explains the points I make in chapters 2 and three applied to the specific bids.