

# **PREPARING WINNING PROPOSALS**

**Presented to Midcoast Commerce Connection**

**July 7, 2009**

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Architects, engineers, contractors, lawyers, insurance agents, accountants, surveyors, bankers, military officers, government officials, social workers and others often need to write formal proposals to win a job or a grant award. Putting together an attractive and easy-to-read proposal is an important step in beating out the competition.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF GREAT PROPOSALS

- Quality, not size!
- Follows RFP numbering and lettering exactly
- Honest, straightforward answers to questions in RFP
- Cover letter focused on benefits to the Owner
- Easy-to-read type
- Lots of bullets instead of long paragraphs
- Lots of white space in margins
- Great photography and great design
- Shaded boxes with client quotes
- Experienced team
- Resumes that are **relevant** to the project
- Project profiles that are **relevant** to the project
- Approach that solves the problem
- One writer so that style is consistent
- Executive Summary in clear, concise English!

## GATHERING INFORMATION FOR THE PROPOSAL

Develop an alphabetical data base of frequently used information:

- Approach
- Budget Preparation
- Client Quotes
- Cost Control
- Firm Overview and History
- Graphics
- Philosophy
- Photography
- Project Management
- References
- Resumes
- Safety
- Scheduling
- Whatever...

## **PUTTING THE PROPOSAL TOGETHER**

- Use a team approach involving:
  - principal
  - lead architect or engineer
  - project manager
  - project superintendent
  - estimator
  - writer
- But, **one** person needs to pull it all together.

## **WRITING STYLE FOR PROPOSALS**

Imagine that you are writing for a **volunteer** small-town selectman or school board member who is faced with the following problem:

- He or she has worked all day at a regular job.
- They helped the kids with homework and finally got them to bed.
- They are tired, and now they have to read your proposal!
- It's a daunting task reading 10-15 big (and boring!) proposals.
- They need to cut the list down to 3 or 4 for interviews.
- They are looking for quick and easy ways to eliminate proposals.

## **GREAT WAYS TO HAVE YOUR PROPOSAL ELIMINATED!**

- Poor design
- Poor graphics
- Poor photography
- No photography
- Small print
- Single spacing
- Cheap paper
- Spelling errors
- Grammar errors
- Typos
- Long paragraphs
- Unimaginative writing
- Too much information
- Same as all the others!

## WRITING THE COVER LETTER

The cover letter of a proposal is your chance to:

- Make a good impression
- Highlight your key points
- Separate yourself from the competition

## BEWARE OF DEADLY LETTERS THAT ALL SOUND THE SAME

**Here are the opening sentences from nine proposals submitted to the City of Bath last summer for a study of a possible walking path along the waterfront:**

1. ABC Company is pleased to submit a Statement of Qualifications for your potential Waterfront Pathway in Bath, Maine.
2. We are pleased to submit the attached qualification package to provide the City of Bath with a concept plan for blah, blah, blah...
3. DEF Associates in association with GHI and JKL is pleased to submit the following qualifications for blah, blah, blah...
4. MNO, Inc. is pleased to submit our qualifications to assist the City of Bath with the development of blah, blah, blah...
5. Please find the enclosed qualifications package for the above mentioned project. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. (**That was the entire cover letter!**)
6. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this Statement of Qualifications for consultant services associated with blah, blah, blah...
7. Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your Request for Qualifications with regard to the blah, blah, blah...
8. It is with great enthusiasm that PQR and its planning team submits the enclosed Statement of Qualifications for the blah, blah, blah...

## **FINALLY, A LETTER THAT ADDRESSES THE PROJECT**

**The Bath waterfront is at the heart of the City's history and an important asset in the Town's (sic) future. The new path under consideration has the potential to help the community achieve its goal of developing a waterfront that is a destination for a variety of uses. The new path will provide a valuable link from the waterfront to the visitor center and the downtown, increase public access, and help to enhance Bath's reputation as a truly walkable city.....WOW!!**

## **AVOID USING WORDS THAT EVERYONE ELSE USES**

**The following words were found in all of the proposals to Bath:**

highly experienced staff	extensive experience
highly experienced professionals	demonstrated experience
highly qualified individuals	demonstrated expertise
highly qualified personnel	broad experience
unusually well-qualified staff	thorough knowledge

**Note: Whether you win the job or not, it is very instructive to go back and review all of the proposals submitted. This can usually be done with public agencies. The differences among proposals are amazing. Reviewing proposals gives you an understanding of what the competition is doing, and it can provide you with lots of new ideas on how to improve your own proposals.**

## **WRITING IN CLEAR, CONCISE ENGLISH IN THE PROPOSAL**

### **Question: What are your plans for public involvement in this project?**

We recommend the stakeholders be involved early on with a presentation of the intention of the project to receive input on expectations and then a second meeting to present our alternative findings and receive feedback to see if expectations have been met and a consensus on a preferred alternative can be achieved. **(One Sentence!)**

### **Some Possible Rewrites...**

1. We are firm believers in the need to have public participation at the very earliest stage of a project. We consider the information from the public meetings when we are looking at alternatives. We then schedule additional public meetings to explain our findings before deciding on our final recommendation.
2. A public discussion of project alternatives is one of the best ways to assure the success on any project. We propose holding a series of public meetings to explain the project, receive suggestions from those attending, and present several alternatives.

### **Question: Does your firm have the staff available to handle this project?**

ABC, Inc. is a multidisciplinary firm that has regional offices with sufficient staff to satisfy the project requirements. For this assignment, it is expected that key personnel will be assigned at the outset of the project and will continue to devote whatever time is required to meet project milestones. These individuals will be supported whenever it is necessary by other staff. The present and anticipated workload of our firm will not interfere with committing the resources necessary to meet the City of Bath's timeline. ABC's internal project management system is designed to make sure that each of our projects has the staff it needs. We review these staff assignments weekly so that we can keep up with any changes in workloads or schedule.

**This paragraph has too much information. The question was really answered after the first or second sentence, but then it goes on and on.**