RFP 360

THE FORMULA
FOR CREATING
WINNING
RFP RESPONSES

Make each section count

There's no one-size-fits-all proposal format, due to differing industry and client expectations. But almost every proposal will include the following elements.

Overview
This is your chance to hook the prospect. Show that you understand their unique challenges and pains — and how to solve them.

Paint a clear picture by restating known objectives and giving a preview of your solution and approach. It's important to let the client know you understand the current landscape and can provide the best solution.

Although the overview is the first section, some experts suggests you write it last. This will ensure you effectively highlight the main points covered in your RFP. Remember, you want this section to be clear, concise, and compelling.

About us
The about us section — also known as the management overview — is about your story and qualifications. Brag about yourself a little.

Set yourself apart from the competition by being creative about your strengths. You aren't small; you're adaptive. You aren't inexperienced; you bring a fresh new perspective. Be proud of your accomplishments. This is your time to shine, so show the client what makes you unique.

Schedule
Lay out the contract schedule using milestones and key dates. This will help the client visualize where they'll be in the future. What will their world look like?

Cite when you will finish certain tracks of work and what outcomes the client can expect. (Don't get into specifics just yet — you can sort that out in the implementation plan.)

Contract Management
How will you manage the contract in terms of supervision, communication, and quality assurance? Will you conduct status meetings? How often? What sort of specific information will you report regularly?

Implementation Plan
Here's where you can sort out the details of your implementation timeline. The plan should tie into the overall schedule summary and will likely include some assumptions and time estimates. A matrix works as an effective way to display this information.

Some people like to use week 0, week 1, etc. instead of specific dates. That is especially helpful if you don't have a firm start date. Just try to be as specific as possible.

Other details to cover include:

- Risks or potential problems
- Location of the work or team (on-site, off-site)
- Project staffing (by name or job title)

In some cases, the project manager handles the implementation plan. Just remember not to be too aggressive and set up your team for failure.

Addressing bias
While answering the required questions, look out for bias. Pay close attention to the language used in each question to determine if the client seems to favor one approach versus another.

If so, it may be an indication that your competitor got to the client first. See if you can overcome bias through education and awareness.

References and case studies
People like to know about past successes. Sometimes potential clients will want to talk to or visit references, so having client advocates is always good.

Other times, clients are looking for companies that had similar problems and want to read case studies. Demonstrate how you help your customers solve their problems.

Templates
OpenOffice offers a number of templates to help you create proposals quickly. It's free and works well with Office apps.

These sites also offer free proposal templates:

• proposable.com/templates
• howdesign.com/design-business/proposal/

If you're pursuing federal opportunities, Fedmarket offers a proposal template that's popular in the federal contracting world.

Hit the right objectives in each section

What's the difference between a passable proposal and a standout proposal?

It's a question that haunts many RFP responders late into the night. Fortunately, it often comes down to achieving two key goals:

1. Answering the question
2. Demonstrating your unique value

It's just that simple … and it's just that difficult.

Answering the question effectively means truly understanding your prospect's needs and pains. It's

where a strong client discovery process comes into play.

Demonstrating your unique value is a bit trickier — but strong competitive intelligence can help. You need to know what you can offer that your competitors can't. And you need to explain that clearly in a way that resonates with your prospect.

Answering the "so what" question can help you more effectively communicate your value. For example, you might offer digital marketing solutions — but so what? Well, if you can say your digital marketing solutions double your clients' leads, now you've got a hook.

While there is no perfect formula for persuasive writing, there are a few people who are really good at it that we can learn from (even if they're not proposal writers).

• **"How to Craft Your Wow Statement."**
This video is short, simple, and extremely actionable. It will help you explain your organization and offerings in a clear, compelling way that inspires prospects to open their wallets.

• **Good Content vs. Good Enough Content.**
This presentation by Ann Handle, the author of the Wall Street Journal bestseller Everybody Writes: Your Go-To Guide to Creating Ridiculously Good Content, will teach you the three key attributes of high-quality content.

Use these tools to create more compelling content

Below are resources to help you write more effective, engaging content. Bookmark these pages and revisit as you write and edit proposals.

Great writing resources

- [10 Simple Edits That'll Instantly Improve Any Piece of Writing](#)

- Want to write and sell more convincingly? Hubspot's [sales](#) and [marketing](#) blogs are a great place to start

- From the infamous writing guru Ann Handley, [A Writing GPS: The Step-by-Step Guide to Creating Your Next Piece of Content](#) [Infographic]

- Want to make your proposal more poignant? [Here are 317 Power Words That'll Instantly Make You a Better Writer](#)

- Straight from the horse's mouth — [What buyers say they love (and hate) in an RFP response](#)

Design tools
Just like we dress for success, we should ensure our proposals look professional and visually appealing. This list is a great place to start. It covers 42 free and/or cheap marketing tools to help you with everything from fonts to mockups, to palette pickers.

Our favorite commercial-project-approved stash of free photos resources:

- [Unsplash](#) (gorgeous pictures from professional photographers)
- [PicJumbo](#)
- [Hubspot's 550+ Royalty-Free Stock Photos](#)
- [Gratisography](#)
- [New Old Stock](#) (vintage photos from public archives)
- [Public Domain Archive photos](#)

For easy (and free) infographics and image editing:

- [Canva](#)
- [Piktochart](#)
- [And 29 other Free Online Design Tools](#)

Conclusion
Follow a standard proposal template, ensure you hit the objectives of each section, and use compelling content and imagery to create a proposal that transforms prospects into customers.