

Just as Scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz* didn't recognize that he really had a "brain," we technical communicators often don't realize that we have the skills, talents, and experience to succeed at new endeavors like proposal work. And, sometimes it's difficult to know how to market our value in this work to clients and senior managers in our companies. We don't need a diploma from the Wizard to tackle proposals and grants. My suggestions can be summarized pretty simply – learn the language of proposals, perhaps by working on a couple as an editor or the resume guru – and understand how valuable you really are!

1. The Encouraging Exercise...

There are some good reasons for hiring or including us in addition to the qualifications in the Encouraging Exercise...

To understand how to approach your company or clients to persuade them you are the right choice to work on the proposal, it's important to understand why large and small businesses may need help. They need support because...

- The schedule is accelerated and unforgiving
- Regular staff cannot afford to neglect clients
- Preparing proposals involves writing, editing, facilitating teamwork, audience analysis, multi-tasking and attention to detail and professionals who have expertise in these tasks are limited – but we have it all
- Following directions is crucial and some have not learned that lesson,
- Proposal teams are often ad hoc and pretty fluid, built on the fly even though the company may have a proposal center

2. Phases of a Proposal to win government work

- **Phase 1: Before the RFP**
- **Phase 2: Proposal planning; kickoff**
- **Phase 3: Proposal preparation process**
- **Phase 4: Internal and adversarial review process**
- **Phase 5: Production/delivery; post proposal activities**

3. **My Top 10 List of “Lessons Learned”**

1. Follow all RFP instructions exactly; continuously update compliance matrix (1, then throughout).

RFP stands for Request for Proposal, the solicitation and instructions sent out by government agencies and businesses looking for bidders to offer to do the work. This is intentionally #1 on the list – remember in school – if you don’t follow the instructions, you fail. Seems simple, and we know how to read, write, and pay attention to details – in the excitement surrounding a proposal, you’ll be amazed at how many on the team forget.

2. When preparing schedule, inflate time required for production - yes, lie, you’ll be glad you did! (2,3).

Enough said. ...

3. Keep proposal team comfortable; reward and publicly recognize contributors (throughout)

4. Collect 24X7 contact info; anyone else potentially needed (2, 3, I’ve tracked folks down in Alaska, Kuala Lumpur, and escaping on Hwy. 1 toward a B&B at Point Reyes for bits of information.

5. Match identified key positions with potential proposed personnel as soon as possible (early3)

If a viable project manager is not identified and available to do the work if you win, you should probably not be bidding.

6. Keep technical experts/managers focused (3, 4)

Scientists, technical experts, and managers bring valuable corporate knowledge and expertise, and are used to providing advice and sections outside their purview. I have compared myself on occasion to Ulysses’ wife, Penelope. “**What she wove by day she unraveled each night...**’

7. Early in process, draft cover letter; design concept, cover, tabs, spine, CD labels, etc. (early 3)

Obvious to technical communicators who know how much time the associated tasks can take..

8. Edit continuously, but accept substantial content changes graciously -- or at least tactfully (3, 4)

9. Invite a very senior manager to recruit reviewers and lead the Red Team Review

The Red Team is the group of reviewers chosen to think like the potential customer and then to turn around and make

recommendations as to how to recover following the review. Give constructive advice and comments. “This is BS—you should have...etc.”
10. Know when to give up perfection for “good enough” (3, 4, 5)

If I’ve worked on grants, will that help me get work on proposals? How do I use that experience to get proposal work?

I’m going to apply for a job at a contracting company that does government work and completes proposals. What questions might I ask to show I could be valuable or knowledgeable?

“The way you know you’re having an adventure is when [at some point during the process] you wish you were home in bed.” Mark Twain