



vantage point

Why Your Bid Failed

Recently I've been part of two different evaluation teams to hire contractors for two different kinds of work related to recovery from Superstorm Sandy. In each instance I had to rate applicants on a form requiring evaluation of various aspects of technical experience and abilities. And each time I was torn when I knew more about the applicants (either positive or negative) that didn't appear in the responses to Requests for Qualifications (RFQ).

So today I want to help you nail that next job or at least get on the list for work by addressing some of the problems I have seen over the years that have either totally eliminated firms from consideration or simply depressed their ratings beyond salvation. Let's start with the qualifications side of it, the RFQ that allows you to progress beyond Square One to have a shot at some very good job opportunities.

Number One: Read the Request for Proposal. Yes, it's boring, but read ALL of it. Then create a checklist of what the request asks for. Add any items that are clearly lacking from the RFQ but would help make your response stronger and crystal clear, and thus possibly stand out from the competition. But don't go overboard and add irrelevant information that busy evaluators will consider a waste of their time. While it is important to add information about certified hydrographic surveyors for an RFQ relating to water boundaries that only asked how many licensed surveyors are on staff, the number of structural engineers in the firm is extraneous.

Number Two: Address every single item on that checklist, even to say if the item is not

applicable. Omitting any response can be interpreted in many ways unimagined by the one omitting the response. Does it mean the responder doesn't care to address a sticky topic? Does it mean lack of attention to detail? In many instances leaving out any kind of answer will automatically put your paperwork in a pile of "non-responsive" applicants from which you will never be

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removed—at least not for this round of projects. In some instances an explanation of why the item is not applicable shows you understand the project needs better than those who compiled the RFQ.

Number Three: When sample work is requested, just do it. Don't assume the organization or agency is so familiar with your work that this step is not necessary. Failing to do so will either immediately categorize you as non-responsive, or at the very least eliminate so many points from your technical qualifications score that you will never get on the short list. And provide something related and relevant. If it is an RFQ for boundary work relating to conveyance, sending bridge construction drawings will not impress the evaluation team no matter how detailed and beautifully drawn they may be.

Number Four: Supply responses and sample documents in the format requested. If the materials are sent in a format other than what was requested, the evaluating team may not have the time (or ability) to convert them to something that all team members will be able to access. This is especially true for nonprofits. Aside from implying a lack of attention to details, I've heard some evaluators term this approach "arrogant", as though such applicants expect the world to bend to their own preferences.

Number Five: Supply the number of responses and sample documents requested. Don't assume someone at the other end will have the time and ability to make the missing copies for you so that everyone on the evaluation team will have an opportunity to examine these stellar examples of your expertise.

Number Six: Provide meaningful qualifications of those who are named as part of the project team. Being president of a professional society by itself is not enough without some description of technical background and expertise. It's great supporting information to show community and professional commitment and perhaps organizational ability, but it doesn't say you can do the work involved in this particular contract.

Number Seven: When asked for experience on similar projects, provide more than the name of the project. The world at large may not be familiar with it. Provide at least a sentence or two describing what the project entailed in terms of type of surveying or other particular expertise required. It can be helpful to include information about the size of the project, its specific location, utilization of

particular expertise, and difficult aspects of the sample project with a description of how these were addressed—especially if you were able to surmount these obstacles on time and under budget. Examples of teamwork and communication to resolve tough situations can be impressive. Provide a reference for each project noted, with a means of contacting that individual (phone, email).

Number Eight: Make sure your readers, some of whom may be non-technical, can understand your responses. Don't expect your readers to understand some of the jargon and abbreviations you use on a daily basis. The first time you want to use an abbreviation, make sure you spell out the words first and then parenthetically add the abbreviation.

Number Nine: Use good English! Eliminate extraneous commas, break down run-on sentences into discrete thoughts, and focus on answering each question separately.

Number Ten: Proofread, proofread, proofread! How impressive is a response

signed by the firm's "President" (typed in bold capital letters, no less)?

This is, of course, just a general outline of how to get into the pool for qualifications-based selection, and there are many other ways to blow your chances that I haven't addressed. Once you've made the list of qualified contractors, a new set of opportunities await both to succeed brilliantly and to fail miserably, with the latter often related to some of the top ten faux pas listed here. Once having made it past the RFQ into the Request for Proposals (RFP) stage, there is much more opportunity for creativity and flexibility in describing your proposed approach to advertised projects, especially if you can suggest approaches that will save time and money. But again, everything must be spelled out clearly enough that a general audience can understand what it is you are proposing to do. ■

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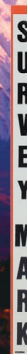
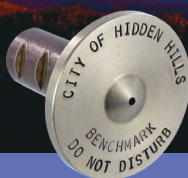
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