

# Power To The Proposal: 6 RFP Tips For Procurement, From Suppliers

**A request for proposal (rfp) is a simple, streamlined way for procurement to assess supplier options for big purchases, but for suppliers, rfps can be anything but simple or streamlined.**

From unnecessary steps in the process to uncommunicated needs, small bumps in the RFP process can make it more difficult for suppliers to deliver timely RFP responses that specifically address what's important to you. And in that scenario, no one wins. Here are six tips to help you run RFPs that are efficient for both buyer and supplier.

## **1. PROVIDE A SENSIBLE TIMEFRAME**

Quality takes time. One of the most common mistakes in procurement is compressing an RFP timeline to the point where suppliers are forced to give generic or pre-written responses. Give suppliers a reasonable amount of time to thoroughly analyze and address all parts of your RFP and ask questions. Before you send your RFP out, double check to make sure you present suppliers with a timeline that reflects the nature of your project. Additionally, if you need original signatures for forms, allow enough time for the vendor to chase down all necessary parties and acquire their signatures.

## **2. TRIM THE FAT**

Another classic mistake is using a standard RFP form that requests unnecessary information from suppliers. For every question on your RFP, ask yourself, "Will the answer affect my final decision?" If not, you might not need to include it. Excess and repeated questions slow the RFP process down and force suppliers to answer prompts that ultimately won't make a difference. In fact, the case is often the more inappropriate the question, the longer it takes the supplier to develop an answer, so only ask what you need to know.

## **3. FOCUS ON THE PAIN POINTS**

A great RFP gets right to what is most important to your organization and succinctly communicates your specific needs. If you want something from a new vendor that you aren't getting from your current one, express that. If you are looking for an answer to a challenge and not a specific product or service, explain that clearly. Every RFP should reflect the pain points within the initiative and your organization because the most valuable suppliers want to know what they can do to help you reach your strategic goals not just sell you product.



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#### **4. REVIEW YOUR RFP'S FUNCTIONALITY**

It seems simple enough, but with the shift to online bids, making sure your RFP tool/system is intuitive is key to getting relevant responses. If you ask a yes/no or multiple choice question, make sure you offer an enough space for clarifying statements. If you need original signatures in a digital format, make sure that process is as simplified as it can be. Double checking your functionality saves time and stress for vendors, allowing them to focus on the ask not the bells and whistles.

#### **5. LEVERAGE THE RFI**

Not every RFP is the right opportunity for every supplier. Before finalizing the participants for an RFP, issue a request for information (RFI) to determine which suppliers are right (or wrong) for your project before they go through the entire process. By using the RFI as a way to pre-vet possible suppliers, you'll ensure that all RFP respondents are relevant to your projects, saving everyone time and effort.

#### **6. PROVIDE DECISION FACTORS**

Process transparency goes a long way in getting RFP responses that meet your needs. Tell suppliers what they're being graded on early in the process so they know what they need to do to win your favor and can act accordingly. Are you mainly looking for the best price, a creative solution, quick turnaround, or something else? Additionally, be clear about all possible outcomes, including multiple award scenarios, so no supplier feels misled at the end of the process, regardless of outcome.

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