

PROJECT PROPOSAL WRITING

Solicited Proposals: Responding to Calls for Proposals

Preamble

Solicited proposal is a proposal responding to a project concept originated by the funding source; usually the funding source invites all eligible organizations to submit such a proposal. Solicited proposals are those requested by a potential funder. Government agencies and many large commercial firms routinely solicit proposals from potential suppliers. For example the government might publish an RFP (request for proposal) stating its intention to purchase 5000, microcomputers, giving detailed specifications regarding the features it needs on these computers, and inviting prospective suppliers to bid on the project. Solicited proposals are written in response to published requirements, contained in a request for proposal (RFP), request for quotation (RFQ), invitation for bid (IFB), or a request for information (RFI). RFPs provide detailed specifications of what the customer wants to buy and sometimes include directions for preparing the proposal, as well as evaluation criteria the customer will use to evaluate offers. Customers issue RFPs when their needs cannot be met with generally available products or services. Customers issue RFQs when they want to buy large amounts of a commodity and price is not the only issue—for example, when availability or delivering or service are considerations.

Learning Objectives

1. To understand the meaning and different names for solicited proposal.
2. **To state and explain different reasons for solicited proposal rejections.**

Learning Outcome

1. By the end of this course, students will be able to define solicited proposal and explain different names for solicited proposal.
2. The student should be able to give reasons why some solicited proposals are rejected.

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Discussion Notes

Different Names for Solicitations

- Requests for Applications (RFA)
- Request for Proposals (RFP)
- Bids
- Call for Proposals
- Expression of Interest (EOI)
- Prequalification

RFA Process

- Preparation of the RFA
- Release of the RFA
- Submission of the concept papers
- Review and selection

Preparations of the RFA

Donor defines the activities/programs to be funded

- Decides who to invite (eligible) — NGO; CBO; Company, etc
- Determines the size and duration of the grants
- Deadline for responses—How many days/weeks should the applicants be given to prepare the concept papers?
- Determines the application, evaluation processes contact person, where and how to submit applications, who and how to evaluate applications

Release of the RFA

Done through advertisements on:

- Newspapers;
- Donors website
- To contacts list at the donor's database

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Submission of Concept Papers

- Must be done before the stated deadline
- Additional information may be requested for alongside the concept papers

Review of Concepts

- Two types of review are undertaken:
- Compliance review
- Technical review - leads to selection

Compliance Review

- Done through a Committee
- This involves checking compliance to general requirements of RFA.
- Mostly based on YES/NO type of questions such as:
- Was the proposal submitted on time?
- Is concept and budget within stated page limits?
- Copy of certificate attached?
- Responsive to RFA?
- Submitted hard and soft copy?
- A —NO in one of- compliance the of above the proposal means and thus no disqualified at this stage

Examples of past Compliance Review outcomes

- Example 1: An RFA targeting to award 8 grants:- received 214 applications but 123 (57%) were non-compliant
- Example 2: Another targeting to award 5 grants: received more than 200 but more than 150 were non-compliant
- Example 3: One targeting 10 grants:- received 81 applications but 41 (51%) were noncompliant; 35% of the non-compliant being due to lateness

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Technical Review

- This stage is only applicable to those who sailed through the first stage of compliant review
- Also, done through a panel of reviewers (Committee) *fair representation Each panelist awards scores independently to each concept paper based on a predetermined criterion
- The scores are then tallied and averages calculated by the person responsible for the RFA process
- Technical review meeting is held and selection done
- The panel may decide to have a cut-off point
- Depending on numbers, the meeting may discuss all concept papers or only those who have attained the cut off score and above
- The committee consider other factors e.g. geographical coverage, inclusion of the marginalized group

Common Mistakes

Technical	Non-Technical
Non-responsiveness cut and paste approach	Non-compliance
Weak logical approach	Poor grammar
Exceeding budget limits	Late submissions
Lack of adherence to format	Missing attachments
Focusing the proposal on the needs of your organization	Wrong addressee
Lack of clarity	Influence peddling
Overambitious proposal	Conflict of interest

Some Futile Tricks!

- Canvassing
- Copying to the —big guns| you know
- Unnecessary decorations
- Maligning the selection process
- Going —behind the lines

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Tips for Responding To RFAs

- Your proposed project should be responsive to the RFA activities
- Respond only if you meet the eligibility criteria for the RFA – in case of doubt, ASK
- Observe specified budget limit
- Take note of RFA requirements and submit all the additional information requested
- Observe deadlines (time limits for submission)
 - Take note of the scores allocation and be as clear as possible on areas that score high
 - Learn from rejection----get onto the phone, e-mail and ask why
 - Always remember you are competing with so many other applicants; thus:
Come up with new and exciting ideas
 - Capitalize on your strengths e.g. FIDA-Kenya is known for its support to women
 - Invest enough time to avoid mistakes but last minute rush is also not recommended.

Common Causes of Rejections

- Inadequate explanation of need or justifications of the project.
- Previous experience with the donor that has not been positive
- The Organization 's credibility public image
- A poorly written proposal or one that does not comply with donor guidelines.
- Failure to demonstrate community involvement and support.
- Non-responsiveness of the proposal to the
- Funds requested that are not related to proposed activities or
- Funds request are far in excess of the
- Inability to demonstrate organizational capacity to implement the proposed program or achieve the desired impact.
- Competitive proposals that were better articulated or more innovative

Handling Rejection

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Suppose your funding request is not considered--- What should you learn and what should you do?

- First and foremost, you should request the donor for either a meeting or a letter to discuss and fully understand why your proposal was not successful
- Every proposal submission is a teachable moment
- Review your proposals with staff and determine how they can be improved. Outline those aspects of successful proposals that should be replicated

Reflective Question

Discuss five reasons for a solicited proposals rejection

Reference

Blake, R and Bly, R. (2011) *The Elements of Business Writing*.UK.