

Introduction

This series of Top Tip Guides has been produced to support Third Sector learning providers so that they will be better informed on key issues and the use of effective standard practices.

Writing Compelling Proposals - Top Tips

1. Develop a strategy for writing proposals – what are your strengths, your USPs (Unique Selling Points)? Obtain as much input as possible from all your stakeholders: staff, volunteers, trustees, service users, funders, neighbours, suppliers etc. How do they view the organisation? What do they love about it? Use their answers to develop compelling branding, a great strapline.
2. Get hold of the strategic plan (sometimes called a Community Plan) for the body to which you will be submitting your proposal. Highlight all the targets they have set themselves that you could help them to meet if they took you on as a supplier. Include these in your proposal.
3. Provide evidence to back up every claim you make. Anyone can write anything – that doesn't mean it's true. So back it up!
4. Check out the competition. This will help you to position your organisation properly. If your competitors charge a lot less than you, position your organisation as one that offers more services and provides a lot more added value. If your competitors charge a lot more, explain that you are “specialists” – you don't want to be seen as the cheap, down-market option.
5. Bid evaluators will look at the risks your organisation presents if you are taken on as a supplier. So beat them at their own game by developing your own Risk Register. Identify the risks your organisation faces, apply the “traffic light system” (red, amber and green) to a) the likelihood of the risk happening, and b) the impact it would have, and then list the actions you will take. A Risk Register is vital for your organisation and a very reassuring document for any buyer.
6. Use robust language: no “could”, “would”, “should” but “we do....”, “we are....”. You must sound confident.
7. Never use poor grammar or bad spelling.



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8. Analyse the question. Bid evaluators frequently comment “they didn’t answer the question properly”. Use a highlighter pen/tool to identify the important words and phrases in the question. Then answer them.
9. If the question states “No more than 2000 words” you should use approximately 2000 words. No more and no less.
10. Use headings to break up blocks of text and to reflect phrases or important words in the question.
11. Always list the added value that your organisation would bring at the end of each answer. For example, your local knowledge, the fact that you’re a route to a hard to reach community, the free extra resources you can bring because of your links with other local organisations etc.
12. Always supply an index of the supporting evidence you are providing to back up your proposal.

*Top tips supplied by Helen Marini of **Westminster Compliance LLP 5 Elstree Way Borehamwood Herts WD6 1SF** Registered in England No: OC337155 Registered Office: 5 Elstree Way Borehamwood Herts WD6 1SF. ©Westminster Compliance 2010*

Top Tips on presentation for your proposal

It is well worth spending some time looking at the presentation of your tender. Here are some tips on editing and supplying your tender:

- Keep sentences and paragraphs short, punchy and business-like.
- Use bullet points and headings to break up text.
- Decide on a typeface, layout and type size - not too small - and stick to them.
- Make sure everything is consistent. Are CVs all presented in the same way?
- Be careful when cutting and pasting text to make sure the format stays the same.
- Make sure you have developed a logical argument.
- Read everything again. Then get a colleague to read it - checking for meaning, typing mistakes and omissions.
- Use appendices for supporting additional information.
- Produce a front cover with the project title, date, name of the organisation requesting the tender and that of your own firm.
- Number paragraphs and provide a contents page so material can be easily found.
- Consider getting it printed and bound professionally - if the client has asked for hard copies rather than submission via email.

Above all, make sure the tender is delivered on time - it is unlikely that organisations will consider your tender if it arrives after the closing date. You may want to deliver it yourself, by hand, to ensure it arrives safely, or by courier for secure delivery. Alternatively, contact the organisation to check they have received it.

Definitions

Added value – social, environmental, economic value created above the price and deliverables of a tender or grant. (NAVCA)

Bidding - The act or process of making bids; an offer; a proposal of a price, as at an auction.

Proposal - A **business proposal** is a written offer from a seller to a prospective buyer. Business proposals are often a key step in the complex sales process—i.e., whenever a buyer considers more than price in a purchase. (Newman, Larry. Shipley Associates Proposal Guide)

Resources

- **NCVO** www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/commissioningandprocurement includes Commissioning and procurement: step by step. This section introduces commissioning and procurement, explaining the processes, purpose and terminology of commissioning public services from the voluntary and community sector (VCS). It includes an excellent further reading list.
- **NAVCA's** [Local Commissioning and Procurement Unit](http://www.navca.org.uk/stratwork/positions/procurement) (LCPU) provides practical information, advice and support in this area
www.navca.org.uk/stratwork/positions/procurement
- **ACEVO** (<http://www.acevo.org.uk/Services+Resources>) has a range of support services to help third sector organisations become more efficient and effective. Support is available for a range of areas including Impact Reporting, Partnership Programme; Working with Local Authorities; Full Cost Recovery; Income Generation; Procurement and Commissioning of public services; Consortia Support
- [Tendering and Bidding Briefing](#) : Give Your Tender a Winning Chance *Finance Hub and acevo, 2008*
A briefing which covers basic tendering information, including key points in the tendering process, types and stages of the process and case studies.
- **Writing Successful Funding Proposals produced by the Womens Resource Centre** focuses on writing successful funding proposals for charitable trusts and foundations.
http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2010/w/writing_successful_funding_proposals_guide_whole.pdf