

# RFPs: Business Development Without Networking

Any attorney looking to build a book of business needs business development. However, networking and speaking engagements do not fit everyone's personality. If you cringe at the [thought of going to a networking event](#), that doesn't mean business development can't happen for you. This is just one reason why requests for proposals (RFPs) are so crucial to business development practices.



**Jaffe Staff**

New clients often hire an attorney for one matter, and the attorney can only hope to maintain that client for future work. On the other hand, RFPs don't just generate new business, but business contracts that could last several years.

Here's what you need to know about RFPs for business development.

## What is an RFP?

An RFP is a document that solicits bids from qualified attorneys to complete a project. It describes a project's needs and asks for proposed solutions. RFPs often originate from governmental entities, but many corporations and nonprofit organizations also create RFPs for legal services. A well-defined RFP allows the requesting entity to evaluate a group of quality vendor-partners that may be outside the company's existing networks.

Many organizations pursue an RFP process to find the vendor best suited for their project needs. It also shows the organization is committed to accountability and good governance because RFPs encourage fairness and transparency. They serve as a great opportunity for companies and agencies to "interview" a large pool of service providers in an efficient and short amount of time.

## How Can Law Firms Learn About RFPs or Get Invited to Respond to Them?

If you work with governmental agencies and municipalities, an RFP is one of the best ways to get more business. You can learn about these opportunities through repository sites such as [Bidnet.com](#), which gathers available RFP opportunities from federal, state and local governments across the United States. Nonprofit and corporate RFPs do require some relationship-building or might involve hiring a trusted third-party service to find these opportunities.

RFPs could be great way to cross-sell your practice areas. For instance, if your firm represents Company X for corporate legal work and you mention in conversation that it also has a robust data privacy practice area, you can follow this up by asking to be

included should any RFPs for that service area be released.

Obtaining RFPs from nonprofits is a hybrid of the government and corporate approach. Having an existing relationship with the entity will enhance your chance of hearing about opportunities. RFPs are also listed on many national and statewide association websites, such as the [American Institute of Architects](#) or [Philanthropy News Digest](#).

## What Are the Steps in the RFP Process?

Once an entity releases a request for proposals, eligible service providers will have a deadline to submit their proposals. The window to submit questions to the RFP manager will often be short, so be sure to take that step right away. The entity may also make addendums to the RFP during the submission window, so it is very important to check in frequently to see if there are any updates to the request.

After you have completed your proposal, you will be asked to submit a specific number of copies and formats. While this used to involve printing multiple copies and creating a nicely bound proposal, many submissions are now accepted electronically.

The review process then begins. This is outlined in the RFP and most often involves scoring criteria and a point system. Most entities post the length of time for their review process with a notification date for when they plan to select a proposal.

## What Information is Included in an RFP?

Organizations will individualize RFP templates according to their needs and a specific project. That said, some key components typically found in a request for proposals include:

- Background and overall experience of your law firm
- Size, structure and areas of practice in your firm
- Diversity, equity and inclusion programs in your firm
- Specific experience in working with the type of entity in need of services
- Client references relating to the type of project described
- Primary attorney who will manage the proposal and work thereafter
- Qualifications of all relevant attorneys
- Fees and hourly rates
- Biographies of each attorney named in the proposal

## Tips for Submitting a Stellar RFP

Some people may want to get creative with their proposals, but it's best to fully understand the entity that released the RFP before going design-heavy. Remember: This is supposed to be an efficient way for the company or agency to vet a large pool of service providers. Answering the RFPs with detailed responses to each question will be most effective. Here are a few other tips for law firms to consider when replying to a request for proposals.

- **Review the RFP several times.** Create a list of deliverables, as well as key information like deadlines and the RFP manager's email address. It will be easier to refer to this information in your document than scanning back through the lengthy RFP.
- **Spellcheck, spellcheck, spellcheck.** This is where you don't want to rely only on Word's version of spellcheck. Make sure you have as many eyes on your proposal as possible. Not only should the author of the proposal review spelling and grammar, but two attorneys should also review the final document.
- **Follow the instructions to the "T."** You don't want to lose out on an opportunity for new business because you used the wrong font or format in your proposal. While this may seem like nitpicking, it does happen. Be sure to follow the requirements, including word count if there is one, and supply any required attachments.
- **Hire a third-party service provider to write your proposal.** RFPs can require a substantial amount of time and effort, especially for government requests. It may be more cost-effective for you to have a marketing/business development agency write the initial draft and manage the RFP process. This will ensure your attorneys are not losing extensive billable time. It also adds a comprehension component to the proposal: The audience reviewing your proposal is most likely not other lawyers, so having a professional from outside the legal arena write and review the proposal will ensure it is understandable to the proper audience.

There are a lot of new business opportunities available through RFP submissions. If your firm hasn't ventured down this business development path yet, now is a great time to start. If you have questions about RFP processes, reach out to us [here](#).