

Win the work: 10 practical tips for RFP responses

The Request for Proposal (RFP) continues to be a popular tool for businesses in selecting legal counsel. In fact, statistics released late last year indicate that the use of RFPs again is on the rise, with larger firms claiming an average of nearly 200 RFP responses last year. There also has been a rise in the number of consultants and online applications available to help companies that are issuing RFPs.



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A law firm RFP response is a time-consuming process, with firms of all sizes reporting that they devote an average of 25 non-billable hours to each RFP and as many as 50 hours to RFPs aimed at reducing the number of outside firms on which a company relies.

There currently are no indications that this trend will reverse in 2014, making it timely to review the 10 best practices for responding to RFPs.

1. **Verify that you want and can take on the work.** Responding to an RFP is a time-consuming process. Most companies consider a firm's response to an RFP an agreement that the firm is in a position to handle the work if selected as approved counsel. Before responding, confirm that you have no conflicts and that the experience and resources required to handle the work are available.
2. **Read the RFP carefully and completely,** including ancillary documents, such as Outside Counsel Guidelines. It is not uncommon for the RFP documents to stipulate a cap on billing rates, require use of a specific billing system or require "most favored nation" status among your clients. Make certain you are aware of and comfortable with all of the requirements before submitting a response.
3. **Conduct your research.** What do you know about the company? Can you determine what internal changes or goals are driving the RFP? Who do you know within the company? Who do your colleagues know? Check for inside contacts via your firm's contact management and billing systems, and your LinkedIn connections and those of your colleagues.
4. **Select the team.** Once it has been determined that you are interested in responding to the RFP, select your teams. Decide on the team members you will list in the RFP as those who will provide the services to the client. From that team, select a subset as your "pursuit team," who will assume responsibility for responding to the RFP and handling any subsequent interviews or communication with the company.
5. **Read the RFP documents.** *Again.* With the team in place, reread the RFP with an eye toward how to best align the team members' experience and other attributes with the RFP and the company's values and goals.
6. **Develop your strategy.** Working with the pursuit team, set your strategy for responding to the RFP. How will you highlight your strengths? How will you address any weaknesses? What value does your team bring to the client that other firms will not? What differentiates your firm?

7. **Write, collate, read and repeat.** Armed with an outline or template of the RFP requirements, start assembling content, determine what editing is needed and assign a pursuit team member to draft any new content. Follow the format requested or that of the RFP itself: Use the same section and paragraph numbering, titles and subtitles, and other format specifics. If you are pulling information from past RFP responses or marketing documents, do so only because it is relevant, not because it sounds good.
8. **Cross-reference.** Cross-reference each piece of your proposal with the Scope of Work and any format requirements listed in the RFP. Give the reviewers of the responses no reason to exclude you from the next round of reviews. Ensure that all mandatory forms are completed and in the correct format.
9. **Conduct a final review.** Ask someone who has not been working close to the RFP response to act as proofreader and check your proposal against the RFP requirements and instructions.
10. **10.Submit your response on time and in the format requested.** It goes without saying that you *must* submit your response before the stated deadline. Confirm the format in which responses are to be submitted (hard copy, electronic, email, online) and the number of copies required. If possible, submit your response early, which gives the client a feel for what they can expect in working with you.

Are you anticipating submitting an RFP response? Contact Terry M. Isner for assistance or guidance at tisner@jaffepr.com.