

VENTURES

FOURTH QUARTER 2013 NEWSLETTER FOR SMALL, MINORITY-, VETERAN- AND WOMAN-OWNED BUSINESSES

Five Tips for a Better Proposal

BY JEFFRY COOK, PROTORAE LAW, PLLC

When there are issues with a proposal in a protest, more often than not it is something that could have been easily avoided with more careful drafting. In crafting your proposal, consider the following:

1. CAREFULLY ADDRESS ALL REQUIREMENTS.

One of the most common mistakes in protests is a contractor's failure to specifically address each of the requirements in the solicitation. A practical way to help with this is to include a matrix in your proposal that lists the requirements and a reference to where they are addressed in your proposal. It is usually not a top-line item that is omitted, but a specific aspect of a requirement.

For example, the government often lists its requirements in a condensed list, but each item must be addressed specifically. For example, if the solicitation requires the purchase, installation, inspection, maintenance and repair of a mechanical device, then each of those items must be addressed.

Practice Tip: Include a requirement matrix in your proposal and address the requirements in the order they are listed in the solicitation to make it easier to evaluate.

2. ADDRESS THE REQUIREMENTS DIRECTLY AND IN THE RIGHT SECTION.

Applicants often get frustrated by evaluations that state they failed to address a requirement when they know they have that capability. Space in a proposal is always scarce, but you should not rely on

information contained in your past performance or cost proposals to satisfy a technical requirement.

Contractors also will make the mistake of relying solely on resumes, attachments, graphs and tables. These should be used to highlight information, not introduce it for the first time. You want to make it as easy as possible for the government to see that your proposal satisfies all aspects of the requirements.

3. ENSURE CONSISTENCY BETWEEN PRICE AND TECHNICAL PROPOSALS.

A well-crafted technical proposal can be undermined by a price proposal that takes a different approach or makes assumptions. Have the price and technical teams review each other's proposals and assumptions.

Practice Tip: Use outside reviews of your proposal to ensure you have met all of the requirements and your proposal is internally consistent in theme and content.

4. BE CREATIVE IN ADDRESSING REQUIREMENTS.

It is no secret that sequestration has caused the government to try to reduce costs. Contractors should consider ways to meet the solicitation's requirements in an innovative and cost-effective manner.

5. ADDRESS THE REQUIREMENTS AS THEY ARE, NOT AS THEY SHOULD BE.

One pitfall contractors fall into is deciding that a solicitation requirement is impractical. The government, however, could ding the proposal for not meeting a specified requirement. If you have an issue or concern with a solicitation requirement, then submit a question or request a clarification from the government.

After receiving a notice of award, you should request a debriefing whether you won or lost. If you lost, a debriefing will give you a chance to learn how you could improve your proposal, or it may give you reason to protest the award if you learn the evaluation was not conducted properly. You should also consider a debriefing even if you won because you can learn what the customer liked and incorporate those lessons in future bids. ■



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Jeffry Cook is a government contracts attorney at Protora Law, PLLC. For more information, contact him at 703-749-8507 or jcook@protoraclaw.com, or visit www.protoraclaw.com.

VEDP's Going Global Defense Initiative

BY JENEE ANDREEV,
VIRGINIA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP

The Going Global Defense Initiative of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) leverages federal funding to mitigate the impact of defense spending cuts on Virginia's economy. Until June 30, 2014, \$1.5 million is available to help Virginia's defense-related companies diversify into new international markets.

As a part of this initiative, eligible firms can receive assistance with marketing, strategy, compliance and matchmaking services to increase international sales. New-to-export companies and current exporters will receive training and resources to obtain long term sales in international markets. Export-related services will be available to participating companies through the following:

MARKET RESEARCH: Use VEDP – International Trade's network of consultants in more than 57 countries for market research. Services include compiling background information, identifying potential distributors, conducting due diligence, assessing competition and helping your company understand the regulatory environment.

Eligible companies can also receive business matchmaking services. VEDP – International Trade arranges these trips for companies to meet with potential partners, distributors and customers. These visits are business meetings set up on your behalf, with your input, to save you time and maximize your results.

EXPORT COMPLIANCE: Receive an export compliance analysis, and receive assistance submitting the required paperwork to the Department of State in compliance with International Trade in Arms Regulations.

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION, WEB SITE TRANSLATION AND MARKETING: Receive assistance in enhancing your company's marketing and digital presence to target foreign markets.

EXPORT TRAINING: Participate in a series of training sessions, held throughout Virginia, on export issues relevant to defense-related companies.

INTERNATIONAL CERTIFICATION AND STANDARDS: Receive training on international certifications and standards required to sell your company's products or services abroad. ■

Jenee Andreev is defense initiative manager at the VEDP. For more information and to learn about the application process, contact her at 703-424-3887 or jandreev@yesvirginia.org.

Hiring a Public Relations Firm that Fits You



BY ROBERT UDOWITZ, RFP ASSOCIATES, LLC

Small businesses need to understand that public relations (PR) is not a magic bullet. It relies on the quality of your product, what your customers say about you and even how your employees feel about working for your organization. However, combined with a commitment of time, budget and resources, a relationship with a PR firm can be long-lasting and mutually beneficial.

Identifying a suitable PR firm for your organization can be challenging. Many factors should go into the selection of candidates to compete for your business, including the size of the firm and the budget you have available.

When looking for a firm, be clear on your expectations. Public relations is best suited to helping your organization communicate with its core audiences. There are many methods and tactics to achieve these goals, but the specific strategies and recommended approaches should come from a PR agency after you have outlined your requirements in a request for proposals (RFP). The RFP should include your organization's background, goals and budget. This will be the guidepost of your communications plan for the hired agency during the proposal process.

Focus on PR firms that have demonstrated experience in your industry. Be open to including agencies of various sizes, including small businesses that may be better suited to work with your company.

During the evaluation process, it's critical to establish a selection committee and to create a scorecard that considers all the elements of the RFP. The scorecard ensures that each firm is on equal ground and gets a fair opportunity to win your business.

As some of your candidates become finalists, give those firms time to prepare their final, face-to-face presentations. The interview process will help you assess the chemistry between the agency and your organization, perhaps the most important factor in deciding which firm should get your business. The result should produce a satisfying, long-term partnership. ■

Robert Udowitz is principal at RFP Associates, LLC. For more information, visit www.rfpassociates.net.

The 8(a) Business Development Program

BY BILL YOUNG, FAIRFAX COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

The Small Business Act of 1953 established the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) to assist in the development and growth of small businesses. Section 8(a) of that act gave the SBA authority to contract with other government departments and agencies to subcontract with small businesses. The intent of this legislation was to enable the SBA to make certain that small businesses can participate in government procurement opportunities during times of rapid mobilization in response to armed conflicts and other major emergencies.

The SBA 8(a) Business Development Program is a business assistance program for small disadvantaged businesses. To become certified as an 8(a) company, the owner(s) of the business must be socially or economically disadvantaged, own at least 51 percent of a company that meets the SBA small-business size standards, have a financial net worth of less than \$250,000 (excluding their residence and equity in the business) and be a U.S. citizen.

Participation in the program is divided into two phases over nine years: a four-year developmental stage and a five-year transition stage. Participants can receive sole-source contracts, up to a ceiling of \$4 million for goods and services and \$6.5 million for manufacturing. While the SBA helps 8(a) firms build their competitive and institutional know-how, they also encourage the business owners to participate in competitive acquisitions. The 8(a) firms are also able to form joint ventures and teams to bid on government contracts. This enhances the ability of 8(a) firms to work on larger prime contracts and overcome contract bundling, which combines two or more contracts together into one large contract.

For more information about the SBA 8(a) Business Development Program, visit www.sba.gov. ■

Bill Young is associate business development manager in the Business Diversity Division at the Fairfax County Economic Development Authority. For more information, contact him at 703-790-0600 or wyoung@fceda.org.

APP(LY) NOTED

GoToMeeting



"If you are like me, it is hard to make all of the business meetings you have to attend. Between e-mails, phone calls and business travel, I feel like I have to be in two places at the same time. Luckily, I discovered that GoToMeeting.com has an app. You can dial in to a conference remotely from anywhere and you can see or share content from your phone. Or, you can use the face-to-face feature to see everyone in the meeting. Finally, if you forgot something that was said during the meeting, don't worry—all meetings can be recorded. It's a very cool app!"

— Submitted by Robert P. Rogers, president and CEO, Chesapeake Government Health Services, www.chesapeakegovhealth.com.

If you would like to share information with Business Ventures readers about a business-related app that leads to increased productivity, send your comments to kmsaw@fceda.org. In the subject line include "App(ly) Noted."

Kudos

Anna Urman was recently named director of the Virginia Procurement and Technical Assistance Program. Anna, formerly with the Community Business Partnership, has been advising and working with companies in federal contracting since 2003.

Lani Hay, founder and CEO of Tysons Corner, Va.-based Lanmark Technology, was recently named to Fortune magazine's "40 Under 40" list, which highlights rising stars in business. In 2013, this service-disabled-veteran, woman-owned firm had an annual revenue close to \$40 million. ■



FAIRFAX COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

8300 Boone Boulevard, Suite 450, Tysons Corner, Virginia 22182 USA
Telephone: 703-790-0600 • Fax: 703-893-1269
info@fceda.org • www.fairfaxcountyyeda.org

The Fairfax County Economic Development Authority (FCEDA) promotes Fairfax County as a world-class center of commerce and trade and the technology hub of the east coast. The FCEDA assists businesses interested in locating, relocating or expanding their commercial office or industrial operations in Fairfax County. Services are available on a confidential, no-cost basis. As an independent authority created under state law, the FCEDA operates under the direction of seven Commissioners appointed by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. Its activities are funded by Fairfax County.

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FYI: Events and Resources

The Fairfax County Economic Development Authority (FCEDA)'s Midyear Real Estate Report is available in print and online. The Real Estate Report, which is published twice a year, provides data on construction activity, leasing activity and rates, and vacancy rates for the county's commercial real estate market and its major submarkets. To request a copy, visit www.fceda.org/publications.

The FCEDA, in partnership with the Virginia Department of Business Assistance (DBA) and the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), conducts a monthly workshop, "Entrepreneurship 101: Starting a Business in Fairfax County." The workshop provides an overview of start-up basics (licenses and permits); DBA workforce service and training programs; and SBA resources, financing and certification programs. The workshop is held the first Tuesday of each month from 8:00 am–10:30 am. There is no cost to attend, but pre-registration is required. The 2014 schedule is: January 7, February 4, March 4, April 1, May 6, June 3, September 9, October 7, and November 4. For more information or to register for the workshops, call 703-790-0600 or visit www.fairfaxcountyyeda.org/starting-business-seminar.

The Fairfax County Department of Purchasing and Supply Management Agency, Office of Small Business sponsors a free monthly workshop, "Selling to Fairfax County." The workshops are held the third Wednesday of each month. You will have an opportunity to meet staff from the county's Purchasing Department and discuss upcoming contracting opportunities. All workshops are free of charge, but registration is recommended as seating is limited. Workshops are held at the Fairfax County Government Center, 12000 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax, Va., from 9:00 AM–11:00 AM. For more information or to register, call 703 324-3201 or visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpsm.

The 9th Annual Veterans in Business (VIB) Conference is scheduled for March 27, 2014, at the Army Navy Country Club in Arlington, Va. The VIB provides education, networking and business opportunities for Veteran and Service Disabled Veteran Small Business Owners. The conference was created by civic and business leaders in northern Virginia to provide training and exposure to veterans who wish to build their businesses through contracting and subcontracting opportunities with the federal government. For more information, contact Charles McCaffrey at 703-768-1440 or visit www.veteransbusinessconference.com/index.

The U.S. Pan Asian American Chamber of Commerce Education Foundation's annual procurement conference "CelebrateAsian" will be held June 2-4, 2014, at the Sheraton Premiere in Tysons Corner, Va. The event is the largest national Asian-American business conference in the U.S. The conference will bring together some of the brightest Asian-American entrepreneurs in business, science and technology, engineering, communications, advertising and media, manufacturing, transportation, and finance and insurance to network with procurement and marketing professionals from major corporations and governments. For more information call, 202-296-5221 or visit www.uspaacc.com.