10 Most Common Mistakes Contractors Make in the Proposal Process

1. **Not performing adequate marketing and business development due diligence:**
   - Did not market technical POCs sufficiently to ensure understanding of the requirement.
   - Did not start marketing early enough. Rarely does a contractor win if they wait to initiate their bid for the contract at RFP release. Most wins occur when the contractor is known to the customer and provides a responsive proposal.

2. **Contractors should know who the competition is:**
   - Understand the strengths and weaknesses of the competition as well as those of their own company.
   - When the contractor cannot overcome or ghost some of their weaknesses as opposed to strengths of another company, a "no" bid is probably the right answer.

3. **Not “Answering the Mail”**
   - Contractors often do not respond to what has been published. Common mistakes are:
     i. Did not perform an adequate RFP analysis.
     ii. Did not create a detailed proposal to RFP cross matrix.
     iii. Did not follow the instructions to the offeror in the RFP precisely, i.e., number and type of volumes, margins, maximum number of pages for a volume. The first step the Government makes upon receipt of proposals will be to check to determine initial responsiveness. They will measure margins and count pages and return any over the maximum stated in the RFP.
     iv. Did not acknowledge all amendments to the RFP.
     v. Did not acknowledge and accept, or take exception to, all terms and conditions in the RFP.

4. **Not providing a detailed basis of pricing estimates:**
   - Cost estimating relationships (CERs) and cost pools are not adequately defined.
   - Did not complete forms or responses with statements showing an understanding of the types of positions required and USG DOL law.

5. **Not showing a total understanding of the requirement:**
   - This goes back to performing technical marketing at least one year prior to release of RFP, and two or more years if it is a very large requirement.
   - Parroting the statement of work back to the Government without telling “how” the contractor will perform the requirements.

6. **Not providing sufficient and total detail on past performance, including any negatives and corrective action taken to correct the negatives:**
   - Ensuring that current or previous contract POCs receive past performance information in sufficient time to return to the Government RFP POC.
   - If no relevant past performance within time frame is specified in the RFP, understand that past performance will be rated as neutral – mid-point of the past performance rating scale.

7. **Not having the proposal signed, or not having it signed by an authorized company official:**
• Most RFPs contain a model contract. Offeror must complete all fill-ins, provide a proposal validity date, and sign the model contract cover sheet.

8. Not providing adequate cost or pricing data or other than cost or pricing data as stipulated in the RFP.

9. Proposing key personnel that do not have sufficient experience and background that match the requirement.

10. Low balling or high balling. The government has an independently derived cost estimate. If the cost is extremely low compared to the government estimate, it raises questions of not understanding the requirement. The same is true if the cost is too high in comparison to the government estimate.

Bonus Point:

   Not submitting a proposal sufficient for a best and final. The RFP will likely state that the government will award without discussions should the submittals warrant that action. Make the first shot the best shot.

This list was developed from our conversations with contacts on the government’s side of contracting. In no way is the list intended to be inclusive, but these mistakes are the most common ones. The bottom line is that a contractor can only perform the contract if they can win the contract.