

Journal

APMP

Your Professional Guide to Winning Business

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TIME FOR A 'BLACK HAT' REVIEW



SECTION M IS KING

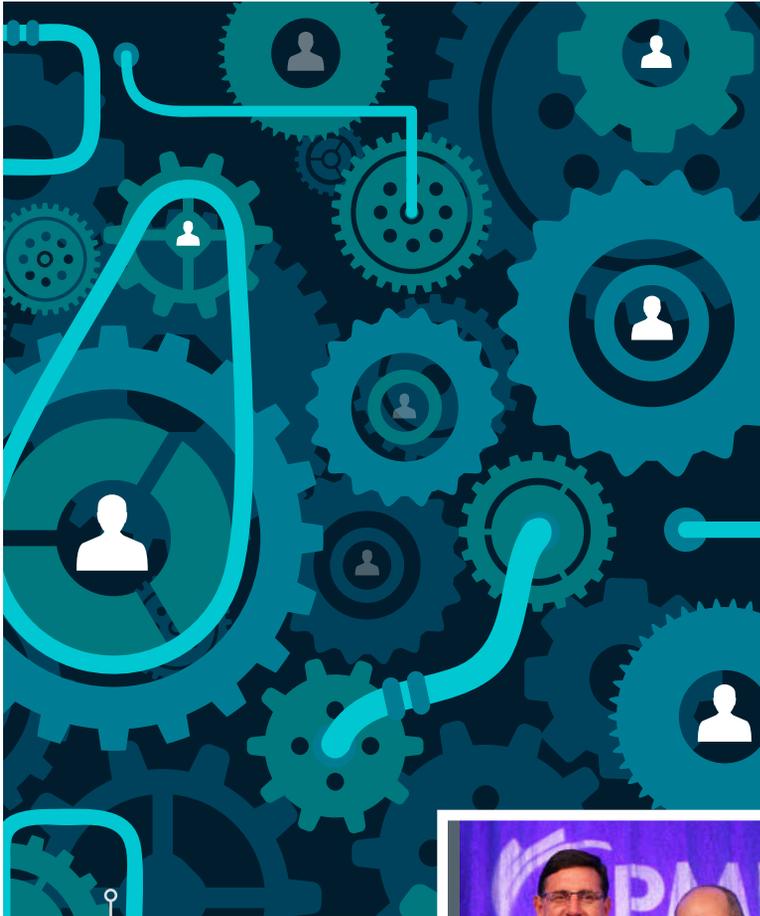
TAKE THREE MONTHS TO FIX YOUR PROPOSAL MANAGEMENT PROCESS

GRAMMARIANS AT THE GATE

A LIFETIME'S WORTH OF WINS

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THE HYBRID APPROACH

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Section M Is King

MAPPING YOUR VALIDATED STRENGTHS TO THE EVALUATION FACTORS

By Dr. Robert S. Frey, APMP Fellow, MBA



Ask and answer the question, **“What specific benefits will the government receive**—in terms they care about—from our technical and management approach?” Highlight those benefits.

Do the planning, thinking, and illustrating before you do the writing. You'll be amazed at how many bid and proposal dollars your company will save over time.

PROPOSALS ARE EVALUATED in accordance with strengths, weaknesses, deficiencies, and risks. U.S. government agencies evaluate proposals in terms of the strengths that the prime offeror provides in accordance with Section M, Evaluation Factors for Award.* In federal source-selection parlance, strengths are aspects of an offeror's proposal that enhance the potential for successful contract performance; provide additional value; deliver significant tangible and intangible benefits; or contribute toward exceeding contract requirements to the advantage of the government.

There are modest but critical variations of the formal definition of a *strength* across and within civilian, defense, and intelligence community agencies. Importantly, the solicitation document may not include the definition that the agency's source evaluation board or other proposal assessment panel will use during its deliberations. And there are cases wherein a direct, written question to the government agency's contracting representative for a specific solicitation results in an answer of “[The government] chooses not to respond to this question.” See the sidebar Resources for Strength Definitions on page 11 for more information about the definition of a *strength* in the context of a particular agency or sector of government.

To increase the probability of winning, companies should determine and document their strengths relevant to the procurement early in

the proposal response life cycle and continue to refine them. Strengths require quantitative and qualitative validation, and results of those strengths in the government customers' world must be highlighted. Think in terms of enhanced quality; schedule adherence or compression; cost control and, even more importantly, cost avoidance; and risk mitigation. Why these specific parameters? Because these same elements consistently appear in every Contractor Performance Assessment Report and Past Performance Questionnaire. Security, safety, health, and environment can be added to these core elements, as appropriate. When asked about the No. 1 focus of the NASA Langley Research Center, government civil servants immediately responded with “safety.”

One successful technique for mapping your company's strengths to the evaluation factors is to build a two-column table in the proposal's executive summary. The left-hand column relays the evaluation factors for award, while the right-hand column lists your organization's evidence of strengths that correlate to each factor. Note the use of the word “evidence.” It would be presumptuous to assert that the points included in the right-hand column are, in fact, strengths. That determination is for the government evaluators. The winner of the largest earth science contract at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center—SESDA II—had 19 strengths in its Source Selection Statement. The runner-up had 14.

*Note: There are cases in which federal government agencies do not follow the Uniform Contract Format of the Federal Acquisition Regulation. A recently released solicitation for a high-profile civilian agency procurement used Section 2, Evaluation Factors and Methodology.

Resources for Strength Definitions

The following resources can provide more information about the definition of strength used in the context of a particular agency or sector of government:

- *Source Selection Supplement to the Department of Defense Source Selection Procedures*, U.S. Army
- *Human Resources Activity Source Selection Plan, Best Value*, Department of Defense
- *Source Selection Plan Guidance and Template*, U.S. Agency for International Development (April 2, 2013)
- *PBS Leasing Desk Guide*, Chapter 13: "Source Selection," U.S. General Services Administration (Sept. 27, 2011)
- Previous Source Selection Statements issued by the particular agency, which can be obtained through Freedom of Information Act requests.

In addition, you can review Government Accountability Office (GAO) protest decisions that involved the specific agency with which you are pursuing business. GAO decision documents may contain insights into the working definition of a strength. For example, the definition of a strength for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services was determined to be an aspect of an offeror's proposal that rises to the "level of being a meaningful advantage."

IN FEDERAL SOURCE-SELECTION PARLANCE, STRENGTHS ARE ASPECTS OF AN OFFEROR'S PROPOSAL THAT ENHANCE THE POTENTIAL FOR SUCCESSFUL CONTRACT PERFORMANCE, PROVIDE ADDITIONAL VALUE, DELIVER SIGNIFICANT TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE BENEFITS, OR CONTRIBUTE TOWARD EXCEEDING CONTRACT REQUIREMENTS TO THE ADVANTAGE OF THE GOVERNMENT.

Recommendation: Strive for 25.

Finally, companies should consider making their investments in people, processes, knowledge, and technologies within the context of "Can this new talent or asset be framed as a strength in an upcoming federal proposal?" The organizations that have adopted this approach have realized significant benefits in terms of booking new and recomplete business.

Now go win stuff! ●

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