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7 Steps to Writing an RFP That Gets High-Quality Responses

A request for proposals is exactly what it sounds like—you submit an RFP to vendors and ask them to submit a bid and detailed proposal before you decide which one wins your project.

The competitive nature of the process helps ensure you're working with qualified vendors who aren't overcharging.

Even though the concept of RFPs is simple, they can be challenging to write. Read the following tips to make sure you're going through the right process.

Step 1: Get Clear

The first step to writing an effective RFP is to get very clear about the underlying project and what the RFP should accomplish.

Your organization may understand exactly what it wants, but that won't do you any good if you don't clearly articulate that to the potential vendors.

"Keep questions clear and direct," advises Vanguard, the investment management company, in its guide Creating an Effective RFP Process. "The clarity of your questions will drive their usefulness. Indirect questions will likely result in

indirect answers that don't provide the information you need."

"Also, if questions are too vague or open-ended," Vanguard adds, "you can't make comparisons across [vendors]."

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Step 2: Figure Out the Details

Figure out the details of the project, such as a timeline of exactly what needs to get done. This helps bidders accurately calculate their budgets and how to allocate their internal resources.

If you're not being clear about the details, some vendors won't even respond to your RFP. So don't make it too time consuming for them to decipher.

Step 3: Determine the Audience

It's important to consider what kinds of organizations you're hoping to work with on the project so that you understand the audience for whom you're writing.

The more specific you get, the better.

- For example, saying you want to work with web design firms isn't very specific.
- But saying you want web design firms that specialize in WordPress and have 20 or more employees—that's specific.

Step 4: Decide What You Need

Determine exactly what you'll need from the vendors in their proposals. Otherwise, you might wind up with missing or unnecessary information.

Many RFPs even lay out the format the proposals should be in, just so there's no misunderstanding about exactly what is needed.

"It is in your best interests to provide suppliers with a roadmap for writing their proposals that requires them to respond in a consistent manner," says Bud Porter-Roth, author of _Request for Proposal: A Guide to Effective RFP Development_.
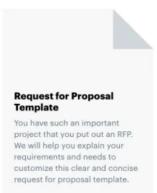
Step 5: Outline the RFP

Now that you have all the preliminary information out of the way, you can start outlining the RFP.

It's up to you how detailed you want to make it. At a minimum, you probably want a structured list of the sections of the RFP, as well as the order in which they'll be presented.

It can also help to go a little further than this by breaking down the sections and specifying the main points you want to cover within each section.

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Request for Proposal Template

You have such an important project that you put out an RFP. We will help you explain your requirements and needs to customize this clear and concise request for proposal template.

Step 6: Write the RFP

Now it's time to flesh out all the ideas and start writing.

If you followed the previous steps in this process, it'll make this step much easier because you've already done the groundwork.

Some people skip steps 1–5 and just start writing the RFP, but that can lead to a lot more work in the end.

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Step 7: Edit the RFP

Last, but definitely not least, edit the RFP.

Some organizations don't take this step seriously enough. But how unprofessional will they look if they have typos or misspelled words throughout their RFP?

According to Tom Sant, CEO of The Sant Corp., which develops software for generating proposals, typos in an RFP are one of four things that frustrate vendors. The other three are "RFPs that are disorganized, RFPs that ask redundant questions, and RFPs that have contradictory requirements," Sant says.

"Committees sometimes write RFPs, and if the RFP isn't edited carefully, confusing and contradictory RFPs can result," he explains.

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