What's in YOUR Proposal?

If content is king, then not paying attention to what's in your proposal is like pretending the Emperor is fully dressed.

I'm on a mission. This post is part two of a multi-part consideration of how to improve proposal writer job satisfaction by reducing non-responsive content and rework. Advantages? Faster turnaround from Go to Red Team and cleaner content. Part One discussed the barriers proposal writers face and speculated on issues that could be causing a shortage in their ranks. I've been known to write a few proposals, and one thing that really bothers me is uncurated content from old proposals. This post has to do with increasing efficiency and eliminating content scavenging.

CANNED CONTENT IS FAST FOOD FOR PROPOSAL WRITERS

It's not good for them. Yes, it seems like a good idea to cut and paste content from other proposals to the response template. A few clicks of the mouse and the section is populated. On to the next section in an effort to cut corners and meet stressful deadlines in a large proposal. It's quick, it's easy, and while it takes too much time to figure out what's actually in there, the fact that some words in the content matched the RFP search words you used is encouraging.

Leave it to the Red Team to sort out content issues. The proposal writer will have another shot at the section, and with luck, the Red Team will provide some direction. The section can then stagger on to Gold Team Review, or whatever color comes next in your review. But wait.

RED TEAM? WHAT RED TEAM?

Do you mean the Red Team where everyone, okay, almost everyone shows up, and a few members read the proposal or the RFP but not both? That Red Team? The result of that Red Team is a flood of comments about "not sure what you're trying to say here" or "could be more specific." Too often, reading between the lines what the review really says is: "Is this content supposed to be compliant? This stuff came from a two-year proposal. It's out of date. Besides, we lost that bid."

That is the point where the Proposal Manager starts to panic and throws new old proposals into an online folder for proposal writers to comb through in order to find content and fix the proposal. Then it's cut and paste and go to the next section, faster than you can say "pieces parts."

They should skip it. It's unfixable.

IS THERE A BETTER APPROACH FOR PROPOSAL WRITERS?

Since there could not be a worse one, the answer is yes. Stop trying to harvest content directly from un-qualified old proposals, for one thing. Reduce the amount of time it takes to populate the proposal with basic compliant content. Here's how in two easy steps.

STEP 1: MINE YOUR OLD PROPOSALS TO CREATE A QUICK START LIBRARY

Remember those exhibits, tables, and charts that describe your staff, products/services, organization, past performance and qualifications? Yes, those.

1. Collect them from recent proposals and file them online. These items are "artifacts" of your proposals, and include resumes, short biographies, contract summaries, organizational charts, and certifications, such as Hitrust, NCQA, or URAC.
2. Are there discussions of training, quality assurance, or corporate governance? Do you have certifications of legal status and absence of contract failures? They all go in the library as well, in addition to workflow diagrams, system schematics, screen shots, and reports.
3. Proof points are invaluable and should be in your archive to support your assertions of performance and success. What? You don't have any of those? Go find them, document the source of the information, and file them in your proposal library.

STEP 2: BREAK DOWN THAT NEW SOLICITATION

When your company decides to pursue a new opportunity, create your response template and then…go to the library.

1. Place the corporate assurances and certifications in the template – if there is a section, that's where they go. If not, they belong near the Cover Letter for use if desirable.
2. Pull the relevant contract summaries for the Experience section, with proof of certifications. Biosketches and organizational charts go into the Staffing section.
3. Populate the Technical Approach sections with relevant workflow, system schematics, screen shots, report examples, training, and quality assurance information.

NOW WHAT?

The proposal probably has at least 40% - 50% of the content it needs. Now Proposal Managers can make sure artifacts are current, and proposal writers can weave these "chunks" into proposal sections. Now there is time for review and editing to improve responsive content, focus on your competitive strategies, sharpen proof points. And win. Need help? [Reach me here].