

Where Are All the Proposal Writers?



These essential Business Development colleagues are becoming harder and harder to find. Turns out, there's a reason for that. And you're going to need more than Indeed.com

WHERE DO PROPOSAL WRITERS COME FROM?

Most proposal writers do not start their careers as proposal writers. They work in a variety of industries, gaining expertise and becoming subject matter experts along the way. Their organizations benefit from that expertise by including them on proposal teams. Some of these individuals will show a talent for it—and some of them will become proposal writers and even work full-time in the field. That's how I got started writing proposals and became a business development professional. I'm not sorry I did, but...

They will learn the stress, uncertainty, and disappointment that comes with the proposal business. Too often, poor corporate qualifications, lack of support, and competing priorities undermine proposal efforts. Add to that failure to recognize how much time goes into proposals that stand a chance of winning. Combined, these issues are a recipe for burnout that sends proposal writers to other jobs. That's not the whole story, however. There are aspects of proposal writing that make it stand out as a profession.

THERE IS AN UP SIDE TO WRITING PROPOSALS!

Working as part of a team, analyzing the bid document and devising a win strategy can be exciting and fun. Responding to client needs with a winning value proposition presents growth opportunities that can compensate for the disadvantages. Teasing insight out of a dense collection of requirements is rewarding detective work in its own right. Turning those insights into succinct responses closes the loop on the process – integrating themes, proof points, and compliant text into a compelling response. It's what keeps proposal writers coming back to work. And when it all comes together? It's what makes you win.



SO WHAT'S GOING ON?

COVID-19 showed us that “essential workers” are the bedrock of society. They teach our children, care for our health, help us shop for food, pay our bills, and relax after work with a meal. Some individuals are choosing not to return to low-paying, dead-end jobs working for critical supervisors, serving abusive customers. Who can blame them for not wanting to go back to work?

PROPOSAL WRITERS ARE ESSENTIAL WORKERS

Companies can take proposal writers, like other essential workers, for granted. With limited line of sight into strategies, they face unrealistic timeframes and bear the brunt of color team reviews. They sometimes have little more than an online folder of previous proposals from which to draw content. Proposal writers have to dig for relevant material and massage it into a semblance of a response. Long days of solitary work, poor direction, insensitive feedback, and stress? It's not worth it. But



don't ask me – a quick review of current job offerings for proposal writers on Indeed.com shows over 1,100 positions open starting at \$60,000 a year with responsibilities so numerous and vague they take a page of bullet points to describe. No wonder so many listings say “Hiring Urgently.”

WHAT DO PROPOSAL WRITERS NEED?

It's more like, “what do proposal writers deserve?” Answer: the same things we all deserve on the job. When we receive them, we perform better, last longer, and our companies reap the benefit.

1. Start with respect. Proposal writers are professionals. Treat them that way. They may have subject matter expertise relevant to the proposal. They certainly know how to structure content to achieve a compelling and compliant response. Pay attention to their expertise and improve the proposal.
2. Include them in key strategy meetings. Listening to strategy discussions will improve their writing through an understanding of the company's advantages and opportunities. It's more than a one-way street, though, ask them for advice on how to frame strategy in the proposal.
3. Use a structured process that includes compliant templates, content plans, proof points, and up-to-date, relevant content sources. Need more information about evidence-based proposal management? Visit the [Association of Proposal Management Professionals here](#).
4. Ask them how much time they need instead of arbitrarily assigning timeframes that require after-hours and weekend work. Be more efficient with a better process to reduce the cost of your bids rather than expect proposal teams to somehow meet unreasonable expectations.
5. Ensure reviewers read both opportunity documents AND the proposal so their feedback is meaningful and actionable – not “I don't know what's wrong, it just doesn't work for me.” Review for proposal quality, not for color, and make smart decisions about reviews and reviewers.

And when the proposal is done? Say “Thank You.” And mean it. Need help? [Connect with me here](#).