



WRITING AN REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP)

A while back, a potential client provided me with some general details of the writing work he wanted me to do for his company. Then he asked me to send him a proposal.

Proposal?! I panicked as I tried to confirm with him what he meant by that since I had never done one before, at least not as a freelancer.

I must've not really wanted to pursue this opportunity since I didn't bother to do research or follow up with the company after submitting a contract instead of a proposal. A little time passed, I came across an article on writing RFPs (Request for Proposal). Ding! The light bulb went on. This guy verbally gave me his RFP and wanted a written response.

When a company needs a project to be completed by a contractor or outside source, they write a RFP. This is a formal document describing the project, how the contract companies should respond, how the proposals will be reviewed, and contact information. Often, the company documents the submission guidelines to make it easier for them to compare responses. There are no specific standards or guidelines for creating the RFP, but government agencies usually strict standards they follow when conducting the proposal process.

Outside companies read the RFP and write a proposal (a bid) explaining how they can best provide and meet those needs. When writing the proposal, the company should closely follow the guidelines established in the RFP to avoid being removed from consideration for the potential project.

A typical proposal contains:

- Executive summary - summary of the entire proposal
- Statement of need - why project is necessary
- Project description - How project will be implemented and evaluated
- Organization information
- Project schedule
- Budget
- Conclusion

My situation was an informal version of all this. The client gave me a high level overview of what I might do for him. If I knew then what I know now, I would've written up a description of the client's needs and how I would complete the work in meeting those needs.

Small businesses would likely do a proposal in between the one I got and the complex government required ones. Most small businesses will be prompted to write a proposal when approaching a client. The client may ask you to submit a proposal outlining what you can do for them. In this case, write a proposal including the elements of a typical proposal and keep it short and to the point especially if the client is not a large company.

There are examples of RFPs and responses peppered throughout the Web, but which one you can learn from depends on the type of work involved. A proposal can be two pages or as big as a book. Rely on your favorite search engine and do the research to create an unbeatable proposal.