

Tender Tip – The Cover Letter

The cover letter is an important and often underused weapon in a submission. It is very rarely actually asked for by the organisation you are responding to, but almost every bid, proposal, tender and grant response should have one. Here are some general tips to get maximum impact and effect in a bid from your cover letter:

- **Where to put it:** After the title page, the cover letter should be put in front of everything else. It should be on your company letterhead. If you have a joint submission with another company, you can make up a joint letterhead if that is the most appropriate thing to do.
- **How long to make it:** It should be only one page in length, or two at the absolute most. The exception to this is if you are doing a combined cover letter / executive summary where you could stretch it out to three or a maximum of four pages. But a combined cover letter / executive summary is recommended only for short submissions, otherwise you should include both a cover letter and an executive summary.
- **Who to address it to:** Take guidance from the document you are responding to. Often there is a specific contact person mentioned and that is the person to use. Sometimes there is also an authority, like a CEO, who may have signed the letter inviting you to submit a response. If in doubt, address your letter to the most senior person. You can always mention the other person as a cc at the end of your letter, and then send that person a separate copy of the document.
- **Who should sign it:** The cover letter should be signed by a person in your organisation of similar stature, status and responsibility to whom the letter is being addressed. If your person has had little to do with the response, or is not the best person to field ongoing questions about your response, then also give the details of the best contact person in the final paragraph of your letter (see table below). This could be the person that is most known or familiar to the organisation you are responding to, and has been responsible for most of the relationship building or correspondence to date.
- **What to include:** In addition to the standard items (such as date, name, address, title and signature block) the cover letter needs to include just three elements, but can have up to five. These are outlined in the table below.

Number	Element	Comment
1	Introduction (mandatory)	A short introduction “thankyou for inviting our company to tender”.
2	Win Theme (mandatory)	A simple, specific and unique reason why you should be given this job. It can stretch to a few bullet points, but should not be a long list of reasons or general statements. This should support and reinforce the themes in your executive summary and throughout the document.
3	Administrative Note (optional)	Sometimes a note about an administrative aspect of the tender can be provided. For example, your submission is divided into two volumes with the second volume being appendices, or you have included an auto-run DVD as an extra, or you are tendering as a joint venture.
4	Commitment (mandatory)	A personal commitment statement to making the contract a success. It could also include other commitments such as opening your offices for inspection or providing key personnel for a presentation.
5	Contact (optional)	Details about the most appropriate contact person (name, position, telephone, e-mail) if different from the person signing the letter.