

## Tender Tip – Ways to Spot the “Wired” RFP

Incumbent suppliers and contractors often re-win contracts when they are retendered. With new contract opportunities there might be a front running candidate, advising behind the scenes, that becomes the lead choice (as if it were a favoured incumbent) when the opportunity is tendered. Astute companies can detect this incumbent favouritism in an RFP and related procurement process and will include this risk in their bid/no-bid decisions.

So how can you tell if the RFP has been “wired”; that is, whether consciously or not, the RFP has some degree of bias toward the incumbent contractor? Here are some signs that the odds may be stacked against you. None of them are conclusive on their own, and one or more will likely be true on every bid. But if several are true they may add up to something...

| Possible wired RFP signs |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| 1                        | Emphasis on evaluation criteria that only an incumbent will be able to get top marks in. For example, experience in using customer specific tools or direct experience supplying to the customer.  |
| 2                        | Emphasis on evaluation criteria that are easy to bias. Risk mitigation and quality are good examples.  |
| 3                        | Customer prohibitions against contacting or rehiring the incumbent’s staff.  |
| 4                        | Scopes of work that have evidently been prepared to favour the incumbent’s products, services or IP.   |
| 5                        | Evaluation practices that are outside the norm for that organisation. If pricing is normally evaluated at 40%, but on this RFP it is being evaluated at 10%, you have to wonder why. But this also requires you to know what the norms and trends are for that customer. |
| 6                        | Use of multiple evaluation criteria to address the same thing. For example, requiring that past performance of projects include key staff as well as separately evaluating the credentials of the proposed bid team.   |
| 7                        | Short, inflexible response deadlines. This can favour the incumbent who is expecting the bid.  |
| 8                        | RFP ambiguity that favours an incumbent. For example, scopes that aren't defined and deliverables that are named but not described. Another example is Statements of Work that require you to know the customer's undocumented standard operating procedures.            |
| 9                        | So much detail in the RFP that it's overwhelming. Only incumbents will likely know what <b>not</b> to read.  |
| 10                       | Response page limitations that make it impossible to answer all of the requirements so that only the incumbent will know what to skip without being branded "non-compliant."   |
| 11                       | Requirements for fixed price proposals where you don't have enough information to fully cost all risks.  |
| 12                       | Unusually brief responses by the customer to tenderer clarification questions, especially when there are only a handful of bidders or when the customer is unresponsive to questions it could easily answer.   |
| 13                       | Unusually lengthy answers to clarification questions, often delivered at the last minute without an RFP response time extension.   |
| 14                       | "Processes" specified in the RFP that can't be mapped or flow charted so that only someone who has experience with them can figure out how they work.  |

Knowing that an RFP may be wired should not mean an automatic no-bid decision. In fact, understanding the reasons and needs behind the possible bias provides excellent insight into discriminating your own bid and winning that business!

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