

EOI, RFT & RFP – WHAT DO THEY ALL MEAN?

Anyone new to putting together a tender response will no doubt identify with how difficult it can be dealing with the symptoms of what's known as early-onset AFS (Acronym Frustration Syndrome). An alarmingly widespread malady, the only known cure is to get a firm grip on what commonly used tender acronyms mean. Digest the following definitions to help ease your pain.

There can be four stages involved in the tender process:

1. **ROI** Registration of Interest
2. **EOI** Expression of Interest
3. **RFT or RFP** Request for Tender or Proposal
4. **Interview** Your chance to shine

The very good news is that unless the tender you're pitching for is very large, only the third stage will generally apply. So, let's take these one by one.

ROI

An ROI is a stage which usually only applies to very large projects such as those for governments or big organisations. An ROI helps your potential client gauge the number of responses likely to be received and who they're likely to be from.

The length of an ROI is generally quite short; generally, between five to 20 pages. The ROI is looking for a quality response which broadly outlines your capabilities.

Take care to double check if the client has specified if failure to submit an ROI will preclude you from progressing further with your tender response.

If no ROI is required, it may well mean that new 'players' can wait until EOI or RFT stage before throwing their hat into the ring.

Whatever the case, your ROI response (and an EOI response, for that matter) should:

- Take very careful note of page limits, font size, word counts, the submission deadline and any other directions the client has seen fit to impose. Ignore such seemingly nit-picky stipulations at your peril.
- Minute detail is not required in an ROI, but what is expected is a 'high-level', quality response. And that includes not just a coherent, logical argument as to why you're the best contender, but also how your ROI is produced. A good lay-out and a thorough proofread is highly recommended.

EOI

For an EOI, the client will almost certainly have provided more details about the project and may even outline the type of contract you'll be expected to sign if you're selected for the job. Like an ROI, the EOI will generally be limited to a certain number of pages which requests that no pricing or marketing material be included.

An EOI also gives you a number of opportunities which you can use to your advantage when putting together your RFT, if you're one of the lucky ones chosen to move on to the next stage of the process. These include:

- A better understanding of the larger scope of the project and what the client is really asking for.

- You can judge for yourself how well the client has considered the project, giving you the chance to impress them by ‘value adding’ where you can.
- Developing your strategy and ‘win themes’ – rather like a dress rehearsal for the RFT.
- A possible review of the type of contract being offered and whether its conditions suit you.
- As all respondents are usually published, you may get a sneak peek at your competitors, allowing you to further refine your strategy.

RFT or RFP

Request for Tender and Request for Proposal basically mean the same thing. Whichever term the client uses, know that without doubt this is the most important document you’ll submit. Here, the client will give you far more information than in the ROI or EOI. Indeed, the project brief may even have changed in that time, so take care to check.

TOP TIP: *Assessors are looking for the best responses, so if something isn’t clear to you about what they want to know, then make good use of the query process and ask until you are 100 per cent sure what’s required. Remember: clarity is critical. Without it, you could find your response is way off the mark and your business out of the running for a potentially great contract.*

Eight sure fire ways to put together a damn fine RFT:

1. Go through and mark clearly which responses are ‘mandatory’ or ‘evaluation’ criteria. But ensure you have a response to **every single** question. Even if your response is ‘not applicable’, make sure to say **why** it’s isn’t applicable, e.g. “This question is not applicable to ABC Pty Ltd as we do not undertake jobs of less than \$10000 in value.”
2. Complete all required schedules.
3. ‘Value add’ and optional extras are music to a potential client’s ears. So, take time to consider your strategy and see where you can provide more than is being asked of you in your response.
4. Key personnel bios are considered a key part of a tender response, but many respondents fail to tailor them to fit the needs of the client. If your people have previous experience relevant to the upcoming project, then make it clearly stand out. And a head and shoulders shot wouldn’t go amiss, either.
5. Break up swathes of text by inserting clear infographics such as easy-to-read tables, images, graphs and charts. Don’t forget to reference them in the body of text and never, ever let an image go through that doesn’t have a caption. It’s not up to the assessor to try and work out what it is.
6. Don’t waffle. Padding out content with irrelevant or superfluous material will look exactly like what it is: unnecessary.
7. Use a professional provider to proofread and/or design your document so it looks like the business. An error-free, stand-out, graphically-designed RFT or RFP will go a long way towards your bid being taken seriously from the get-go.
8. Submit on time, in the exact format required. Allow enough time to act as a buffer to overcome any technical glitches or natural disasters which may occur the moment you decide to hit ‘send’. Many’s the laboured-over RFT that sank without trace due to leaving its submission to the last minute when, through no fault of its own, the deadline sailed quietly by.

The interview

In the normal course of events, there will be several tenders that fall into the 'highly-regarded' category. To help the client decide which one will win the contract, you may be asked in for an interview or to make a presentation. A terrific opportunity to make a great impression with your company's 'personal touch', these requests are an excellent way for you to build rapport with your potential client. You can make the best impression possible by:

- Asking questions. How long is your presentation expected to be? Who will you be presenting to? Will there be time for questions afterwards? What facilities do they have for making presentations, eg audio visual equipment, etc.
- Prepare first-class materials. This includes a handout of your presentation which can act as a 'leave behind' and any other brochures or handouts you can make into a useful information pack. Quality is key here, so don't try and cut corners with badly photocopied info sheets or out of date marketing tools.
- Whatever you do, stick to the time allowed. Going over your allotted slot and trying to cram everything in at the end looks and sounds unprepared and unprofessional. And that's because it is.
- Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse until you can do your presentation in your sleep. Hire a professional public speaking coach if it gives you more confidence. You absolutely must be able to overcome any qualms about giving a presentation, so do whatever you need to do to conquer those nerves.
- Know that this is your one-shot at making a tremendously good impression. Don't waste it.

Summary

The whole process of tendering can be nerve-racking and take up a vast amount of energy, time and resources, but the results can be fantastically good for you and your business. However, here's one last word of advice. If you're going to commit to formulating a submission, then commit whole-heartedly – to **exactly** how you're being asked to do so – or not at all.



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