The 2024 State of Proposals in AEC Marketing

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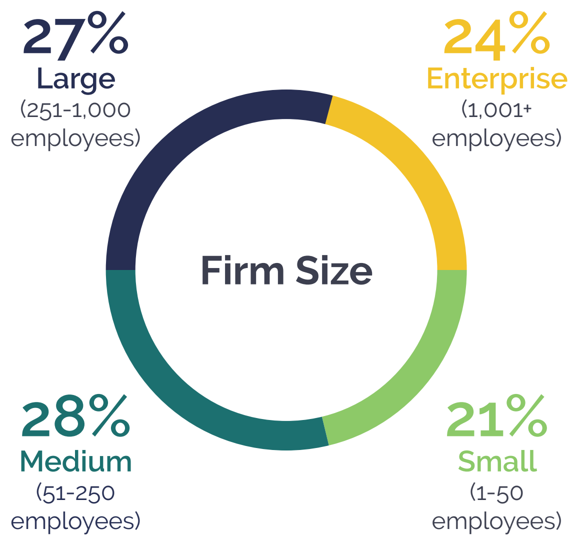
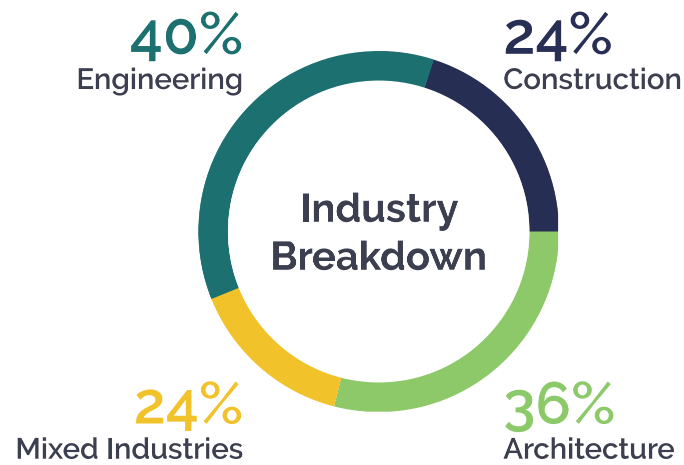
As AEC firms look for a strategic advantage in a competitive industry, supporting the teams that craft winning proposals is essential for securing new projects and growing the business pipeline. To understand the current state of proposal development within the industry, we conducted a comprehensive survey of **535 AEC marketing professionals**.

This report unpacks the survey results, revealing crucial insights into the time commitment, challenges, and best practices surrounding proposal creation. By examining these key areas, marketing leaders and industry professionals can learn how to begin optimizing their proposal processes and workflows—no matter the size of their team.

Survey Parameters: **535 Total Participants**





Note: The majority of participants reported they work in both the Public and Private sectors **(85%)** and some questions allowed respondents to select multiple answers.

**We have rounded all percentages to the nearest whole number. Rounding means some totals will not equal 100.*

Big Picture: 2024 Key Themes of AEC Proposal Marketing

1. Marketing teams are small relative to the size of the firms they support: Over **80%** reported having **25 or fewer team members** for their marketing department, with **45%** reporting **1-5 people** on their team.

2. Lean teams and a deadline-driven industry with competing priorities mean individuals may be required to wear many hats and have the potential to be **understaffed and overworked**.

3. Proposal process inefficiencies center around **finding content and dealing with unplanned activities**.

4. Key frustrations include **data entry duplication** and **proposal process inefficiencies**.

5. The efficiency of the proposal process is **largely dependent on data integrity** and **content libraries**.

Proposal Submissions

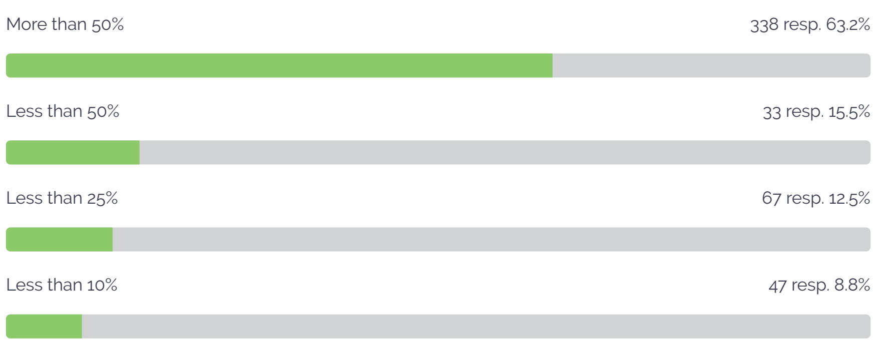
Proposal Submissions

Employees responsible for creating and submitting proposals in AEC firms spend a large portion of their day utilizing tools like OpenAsset to gather, categorize, and manage the components that go into every proposal. In this section, we'll uncover the average amount of time and resources spent strategizing which RFPs to respond to, as well as the submission process as a whole.

What Percentage of Time is Devoted to Proposals?

- **63%** of respondents claimed that **more than 50%** of their team's time is devoted to proposals/proposal creation.
- This finding is consistent across various firm sizes and Industries.
- Marketing teams with **75- 100+ people** slightly skew to taking **less than 50% of their time** (many marketers make light(er) work).

Percentage of Time is Devoted to Proposals



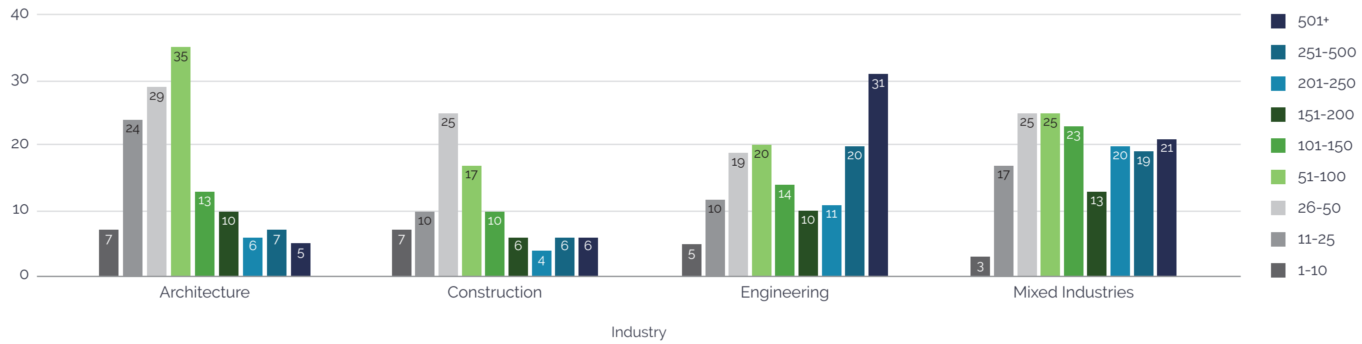
What Percentage of Won Projects Required a Proposal?

- **Almost 70%** of participants reported that **50-100%** of their projects required a proposal.

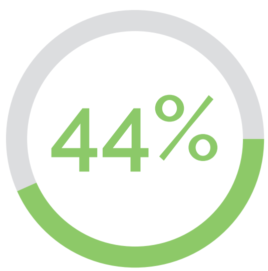
Number of Proposals Submitted Per Year By Industry

- **Engineering firms** report that they submit more proposals than construction or architecture firms. And, in general, larger firms submit more proposals than smaller firms.

Average # of Proposals Submitted by Industry

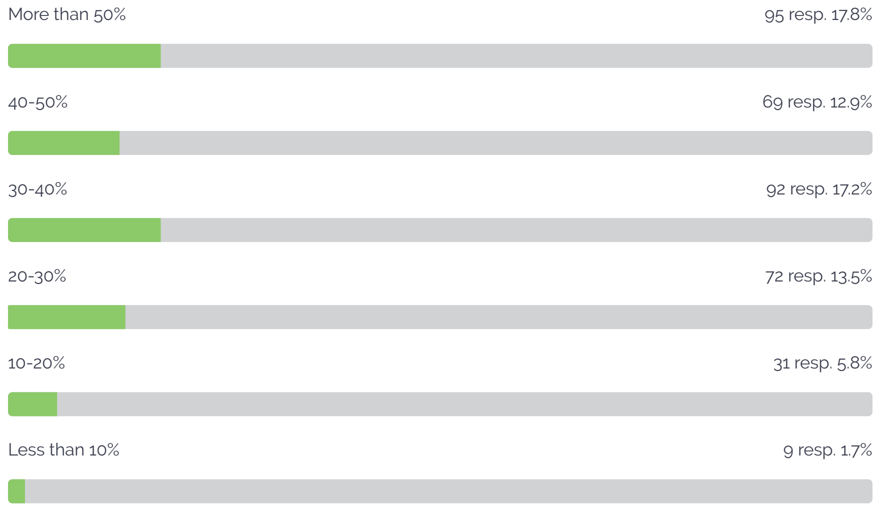


Proposal Win Rates



The largest number of respondents (44%) report their win rate between 20-50%

What is the win rate for the proposals your team submits?



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Meeting Company Submission Goals

- Given their current workload and resources, **only 25% of respondents claim they could hit 100% of their company's targets for proposal submissions**.

Key Insights:

- Proposals take up a majority of an AEC marketer's time and represent a huge investment/focus for businesses' marketing efforts in AEC. Assuming 40 hours per week, 48 weeks working, regardless of industry or size, **at least 960 hrs is spent per year, per firm on proposals**.
- **Half of the surveyed firms** are operating with marketing teams that are **1-5 members** (regardless of company size) This means that **1- 5 team members** are responsible for submitting anywhere from **25 - 250 proposals per year** (150 proposals/48 weeks = 3 proposals per week)
- Regarding industry trends, engineering firms reported that they submit more proposals within a year than their architecture/construction counterparts. However, this can also be explained by the finding that larger firms, in general, submit more proposals.
- Given the significant time investment in proposals, coupled with less than a quarter of respondents believing they can meet company submission goals, leaders should focus their efforts on analyzing current processes to identify bottlenecks and inefficiencies. **Streamline AEC marketers' workflows through proposal automation tools, pre-populated templates, and collaboration platforms**.

Proposal Pain Points

Proposal Pain Points

Considering the multiple stakeholders and numerous layers of approvals that go into each proposal, there are considerable obstacles for AEC marketers in the proposal creation process. When asked to rank their top obstacles in the proposal process, survey participants said the following.

Top 3 Pain Points (Content Creation)

1. Gathering and editing existing content
2. Writing completely new content
3. Collecting content from stakeholders, like technical teams

Mid-Tier Pain Points (Proposal Strategy)

4. Developing unique value propositions
5. Establishing realistic budgets and timelines
6. Creating impactful visuals and infographics

Lower-Tier Pain Points (Proposal Operations)

7. Ensuring consistent branding and messaging
8. Effective client communication during the RFP process
9. Project management of processes and stakeholders
10. Analyzing win/loss data for improvement insights

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Key Insights:

- The top pain points covered content management: **gathering, editing, writing, and collecting**.
    - These are also items that need to be **maintained and updated**, which suggests a need for better processes and tools.
- Mid-tier pain points covered developing unique value propositions, establishing realistic budgets and timelines, and creating impactful visuals and infographics, highlighting the complexity involved in crafting compelling proposals.
    - Addressing these struggles requires effective project management practices to ensure the timely delivery of high-quality visuals and content.
- Leaders can address content creation inefficiencies by implementing a digital asset library, exploring outsourcing non-critical content, and facilitating collaboration through clear request processes.
    - Digital Asset Management tools like OpenAsset can help with the searching and storing of visual content, and creating templates for repeatable content (project sheets, resumes, etc.) to make the proposal writing process smoother.

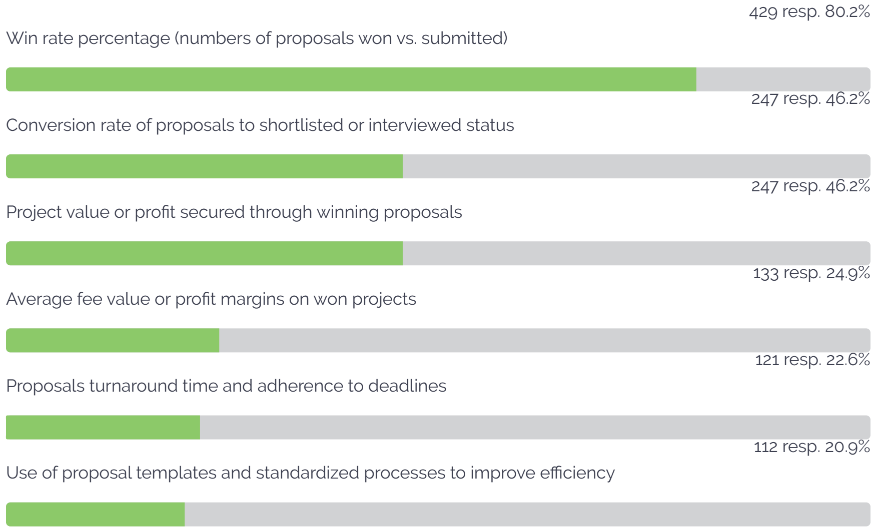
Proposal Success and Creation Insights

Proposal Success and Creation Insights

Metrics for Successful RFP Efforts

- Win rate, stage change conversions, and project value or profit secured through winning proposals are the top-tracked metrics for RFP efforts.

What metrics do you use to measure the success of your RFP efforts?



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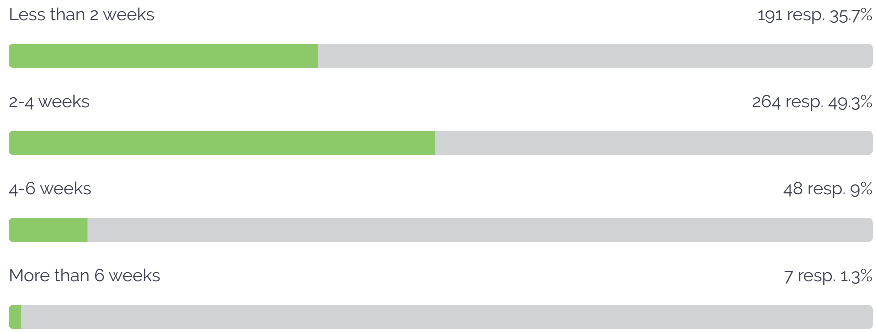
Time to Create a Proposal

- There is a short turnaround time on proposal submissions, with **half of participants reporting 2-4 weeks** and **36%** reporting **less than 2 weeks**.
- There is a noticeable trend that the **fewer people on the marketing team (between 1-10 people), the more likely there will be a faster turnaround** of under 2 weeks per proposal or 2-4 weeks.

How long does a typical proposal take?



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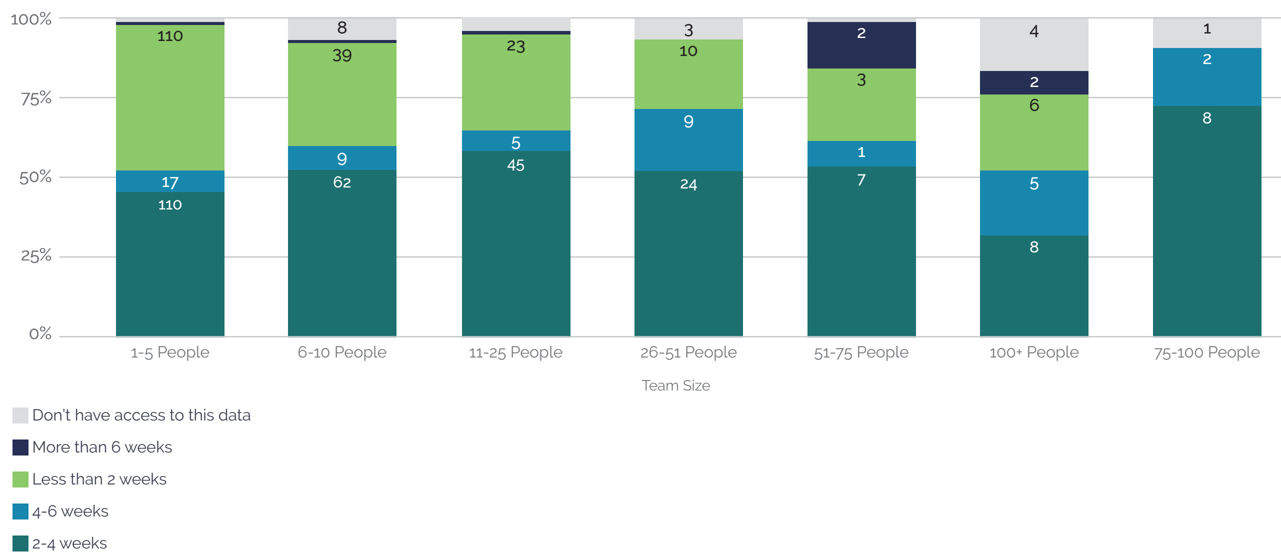
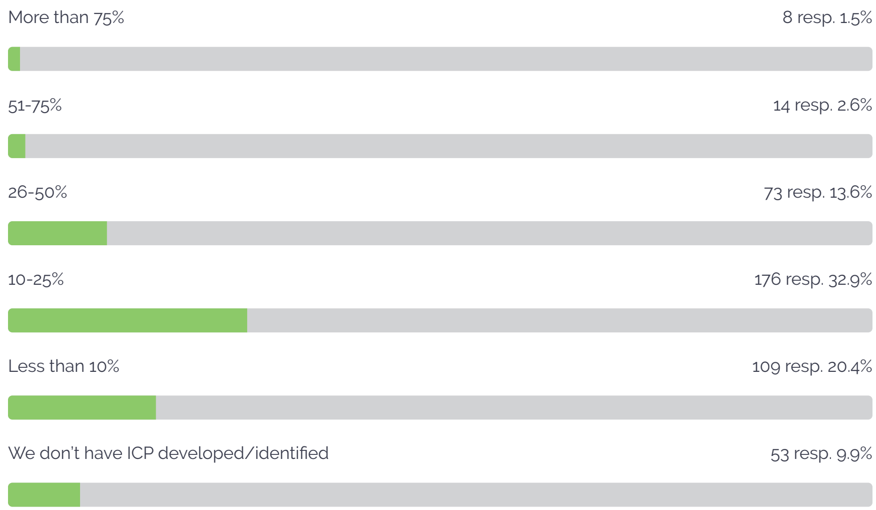
Reported Time to Submit Proposals by Marketing Team Size



Proposals Submitted that are NOT ICP (Ideal Customer Profile)

- One-third **(33%)** of participants reported that 10-25% of their proposals are not ICP but submitted anyway.
- **28%** of respondents answered that they were unsure, didn't have access to the data, or didn't have an ICP developed or identified.

What percentage of proposals are not ICP (Ideal Customer Profile), but are moved forward with anyway?



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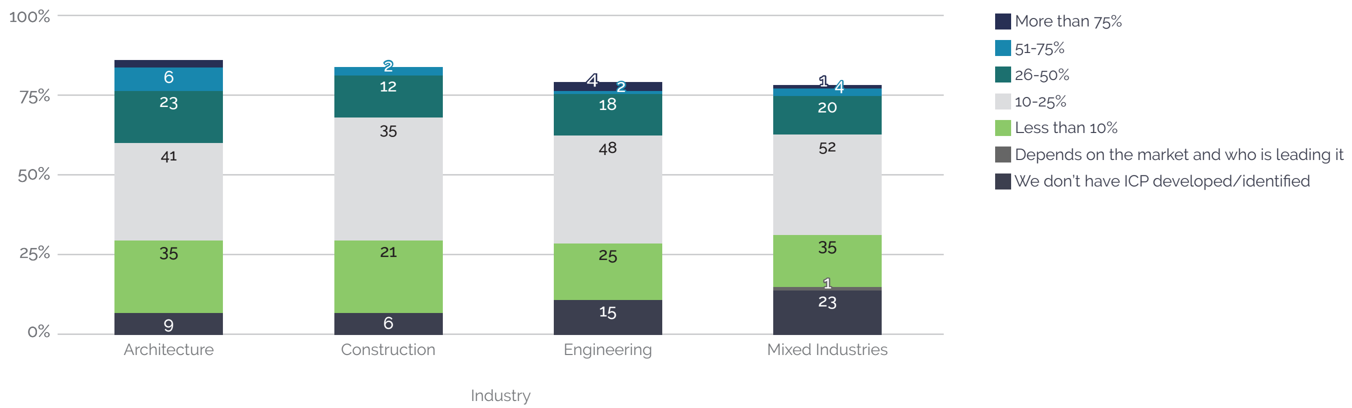
- Architecture firms had the most responses with **26-50% of their submitted proposals don't fit an ICP**.

Proposals Submitted That Do Not Fit ICP by Industry



Key Insights:

- There's a short turn-around on proposal submissions and it's all dependent on two variables: volume and speed. This can potentially cause stressors in creating new content due to lack of time.
- Proposals take weeks, not days. Given the numerous tasks associated with proposal creation, approval, and submission teams should look to automate the more repetitive tasks wherever possible (project sheets and resumes are examples of repetitive tasks that could be expedited through templates/automation).
- The data emphasizes that proposals are often "last-minute" and time-crunched, with the majority falling between 0-4 weeks.
- The majority of enterprise customers are submitting 501+ proposals per year. Additionally, only 40% of firms conduct a win/loss analysis frequently (or more) when a job is WON. This means the hours of hard work that go into non-ICP proposals should be investigated more during the closeout process. Leaders should consider this potential gap in targeting and strategy alignment and how it factors into their team's workload.

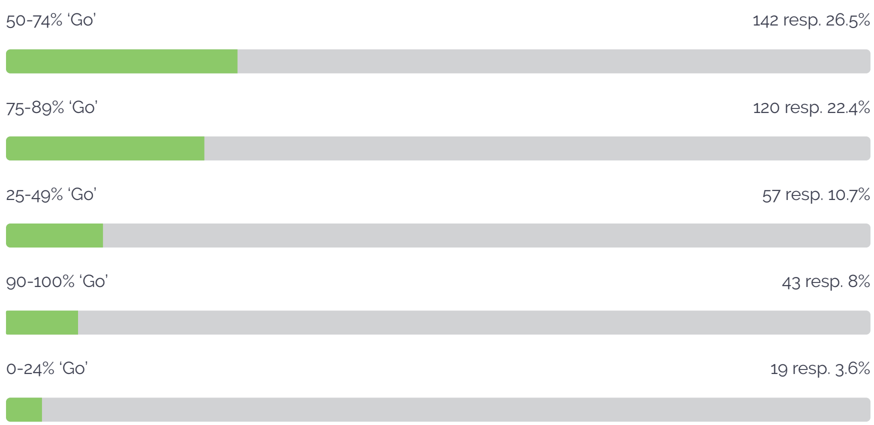
Go vs. No-Go Decision, Project Management Tools, and Roles

When determining when and how to submit a response to an RFP, firms follow a series of procedures and utilize specialized tools and roles to fine-tune their workflows. Here's what we learned from AEC marketers who spend much of their day involved in the RFP response process.

Percentage of Proposals that are Go vs. No-Go

- **49%** of respondents answered that **50%-89%** of their proposals are **'Go'**.

What percentage of proposals are "go" vs. "no-go"



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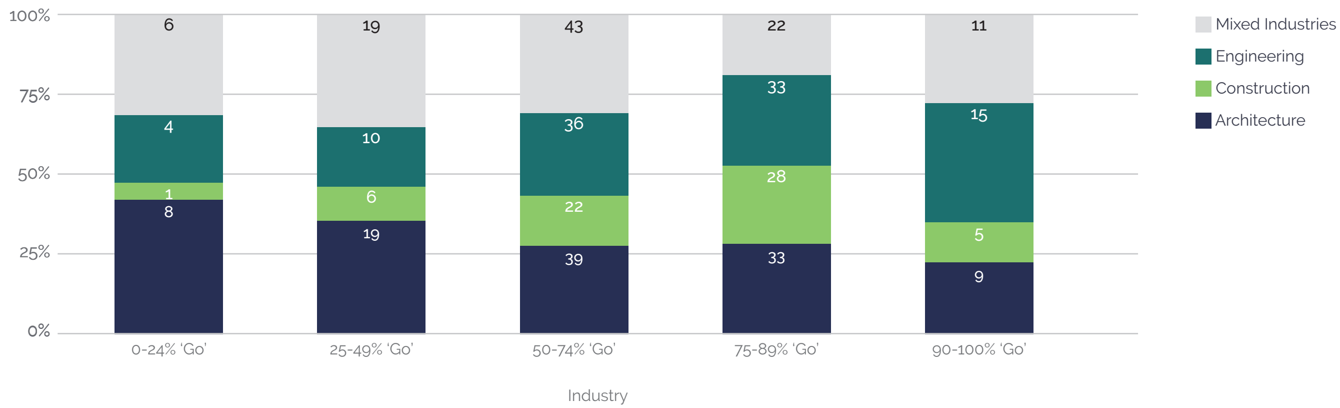
Go vs. No-Go, Project Management Tools, and Roles'

- Engineering is fairly confident in their 'Go' decisions, higher than the rest of the industries.

% of Proposals that are Go vs No-Go by Industry



How to Decide Which Proposals to Go After

The collective ranking of what determines a "Go" from survey respondents is as follows:

Top Tier (Strategic Pursuits):

1. Alignment with expertise and competencies
2. Strategic fit with business goals
3. Client relationship and past success

Mid Tier (Resources):

4. Resource availability and capacity

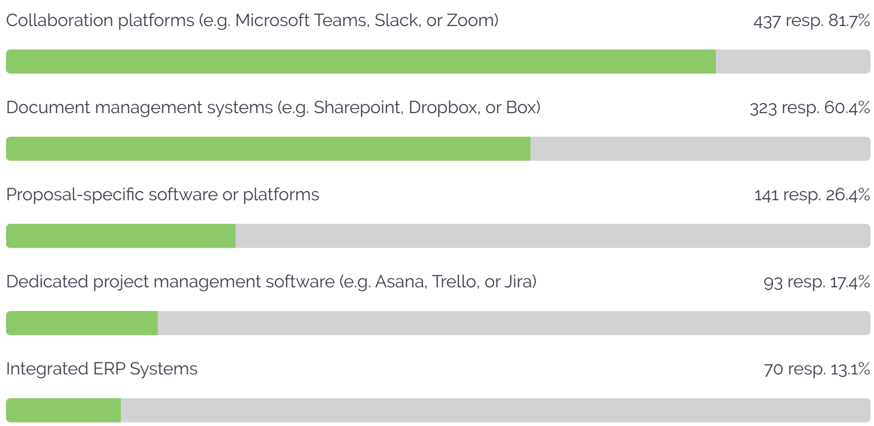
Lower-Tier Pain Points (Proposal Operations)

5. Risk assessment and mitigation
6. Competitive landscape and differentiation
7. Client decision-making process understanding

Project Management Tools

- The tools that AEC marketing teams are using can be bucketed as follows:
  - **Internal Drives:** Reliant on Excel, Google Suite, Microsoft Office Suite, Docs, Emails, Meetings, Internal Drive/Server, or reliant on one marketing specialist.
  - **CRMs:** Deltek Vantage Point, Custom Database,
  - **Productivity/Marketing Software:** Miro, Smartsheet, Asana, Trello, BlueBeam, Bluebeam Revu, Bluebeam Session, ClickUp, OpenAsset, Monday.com, Adobe, InDesign
- The majority of the firms do not have a project management tool in place or are relying on their CRM/Server or living documents to manage proposals. However, most project management tools are not purpose-built for managing the proposal process and can lead to major inefficiencies

What tools are used to coordinate the project management of the proposal?



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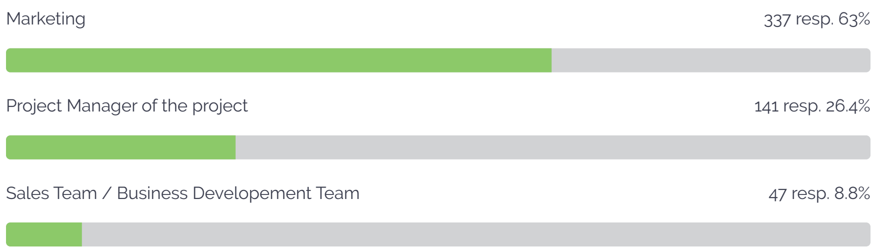
Project Management: Owners of Proposals

- **63%** of participants said that Marketing is considered the “project manager” of each proposal. Interestingly, only **26%** of participants reported having a dedicated Project Manager for proposals,
- There isn’t a consistent trend that indicates that the larger the marketing team, the more likely the chance of a project manager existing in a role specific to proposals.

Who is in charge of the “project management” for each proposal?



Note: OpenAsset has removed responses of “other” in the displayed data for clarity.

Partner Relationships: Project Management

- **33%** of our participants reported not having a formal process in place for keeping track of partner relationships and the projects their partners are involved in.
- **32% relied on a combination of CRM software and project management tools** to monitor partner relationships.
- It’s worth mentioning that smaller marketing teams **(1-10 people)** consistently report not having a formal process or tool in place for partnership management and rely on their team’s awareness instead.

How does your firm keep track of partner relationships and which projects your partners are involved in?

Note: OpenAsset has removed responses of "other" in the displayed data for clarity.

Key Insights:

- Data suggests that **marketing** more often than not **initiates a "go"** for most bids/proposals that come to them based on alignment with current work, strategic "fit" and past relationships. It appears **the effort to apply or break into new relationships takes time** and many marketers choose to re-use content and go after similar/same clients.
- There is no strong trend or preference for a project management tool across the AEC space. Marketers may have in one-off cases adopted SaaS products specific to project management, but **most do not have a process in place** and are working within live documents and Excel sheets. Visibility across tools may be an issue though, and **the risk of duplicating efforts and lack of data integrity is high**. AEC marketing leaders should **consider unifying the proposal process** under a small umbrella of vital tools, as opposed to spreading across multiple systems with unregulated versions/permissions.

Proposal Storage and Writing

Proposal Storage and Writing

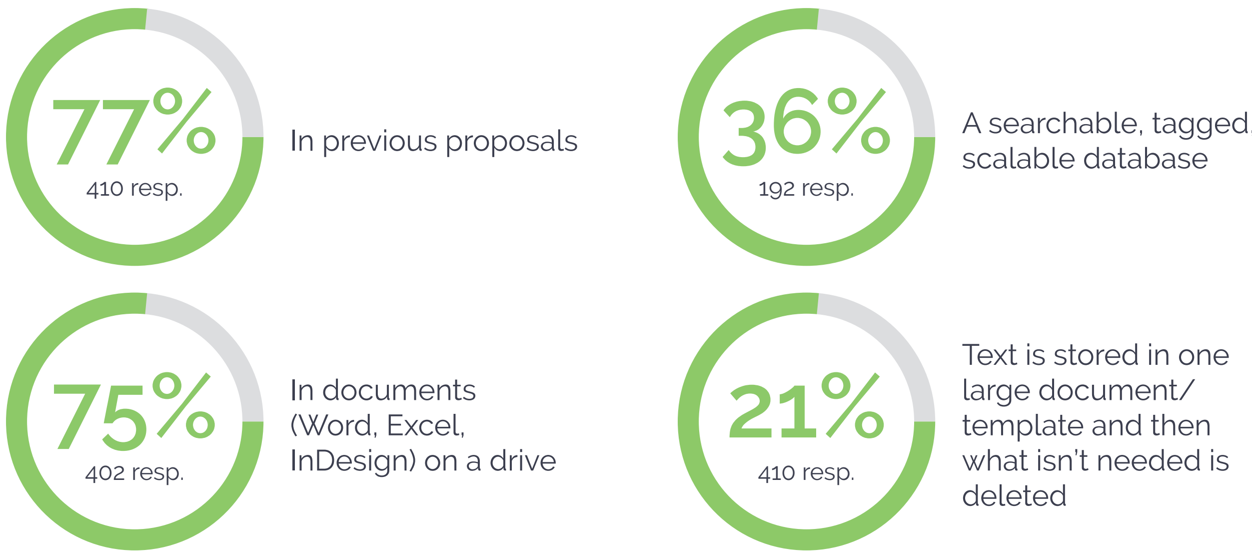
Next, we investigated how existing content is typically sourced, who creates new content, and the surprising prevalence of "writing from scratch." We also examined how firms maintain brand consistency and the current state of searchable content repositories.

Storing Existing Proposal Content

When asked about internal access to content and associated processes, respondents noted the following:

- According to survey respondents, the majority of new proposal content exists in previous proposal content and existing Word, Indesign, and Excel documents, with **only 36%** of respondents claiming they have a searchable, tagged database.

Where is Existing Content for Proposal Stored?



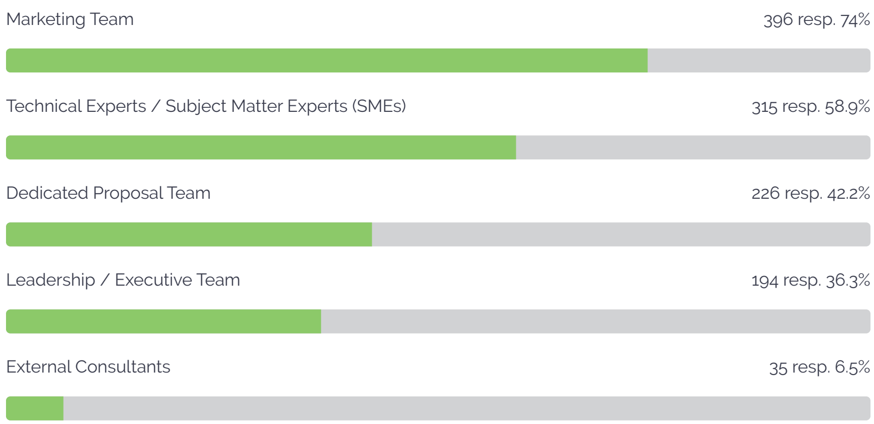
Note: OpenAsset has removed responses of "other" in the displayed data for clarity and participants could select multiple answers

Creating New Content

When asked about internal access to content and associated processes, respondents noted the following:

- The marketing team is overwhelmingly **responsible for building new content**.

Who is responsible for proposal writing and creating new content?



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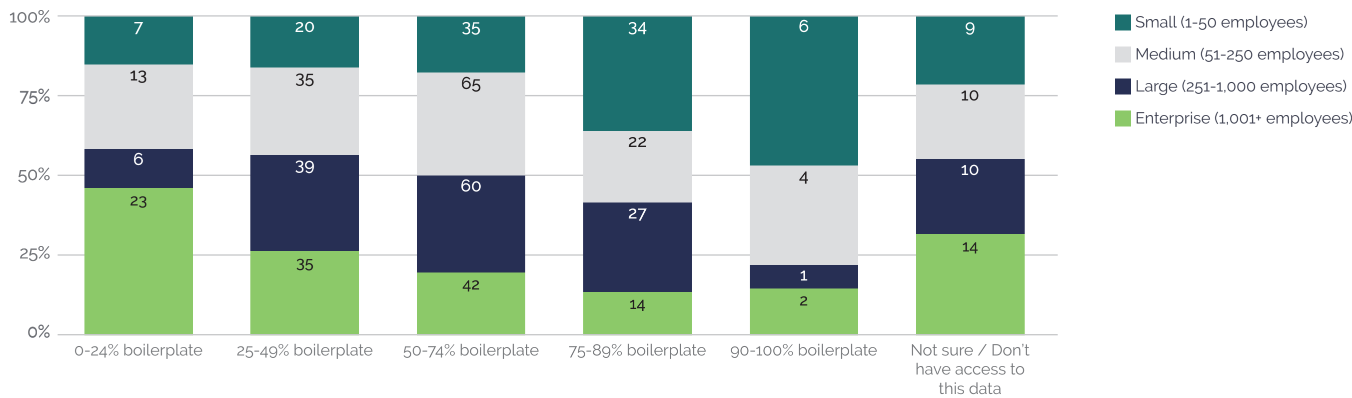
Writing from Scratch

- **51%** of respondents said that writing from scratch is **only necessary "sometimes"**.
- **61%** of participants reported that they use **boilerplate content over custom content** anywhere **between 25-74%** of the time.
- **Smaller firms** skew towards the most responses for using boilerplate content **75-89% of the time**.

% of Proposal Boilerplate vs. Custom by Firm Size



Branding and Tone

- The majority of respondents report that **Design Templates and Brand/Style Guidelines** are what they use to manage brand consistency.
- **Only 25% of respondents said that they have a centralized approval process**.

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Key Insights:

- **The marketing team is primarily responsible for creating new content and protecting brand consistency** through templates and style guides. This makes them gatekeepers of content as well, which can result in many seemingly “randomized” tasks of internal departments reaching out for content/files/templates.
- **Boilerplate text** from previous proposals **is often the foundation for proposals** as firms customize here and there for the specific bid at hand. The reliance on boilerplate content suggests the importance of maintaining a robust library of reusable content. Investing in content creation and file storage tools could help firms streamline the proposal writing process and maintain consistency.
- Many in the AEC space lack searchable, tagged databases for their existing content and are searching through previous proposals/documents. This could be alleviated with a properly utilized digital asset management system, as well as adhering to metadata best practices for cataloging files and text. For more information and additional trends beyond proposal writing, check out **The State of AEC Marketing Report**.

Review, Editing & Proposal Submission Processes

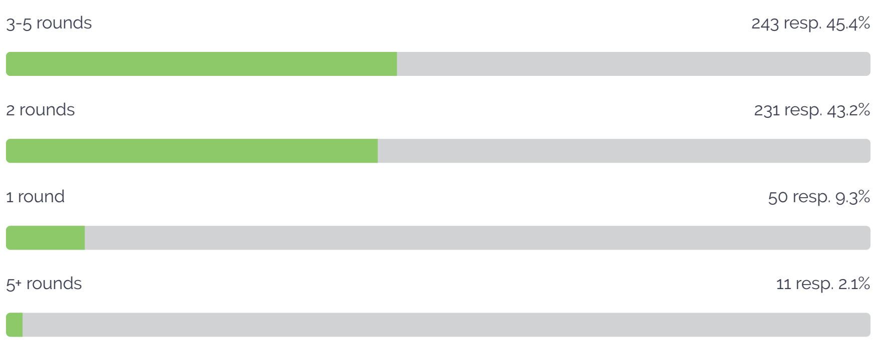
Review, Editing & Proposal Submission Processes

The efficient flow of a proposal from the initial draft to the final submission is crucial for success in the AEC industry. This survey section delves into the current state of review, editing, and submission processes within these firms. We'll explore how companies ensure quality control, manage revisions, and ultimately deliver proposals that meet client requirements and deadlines.

Revisions

- When asked about the number of rounds of reviews tied to proposals, 87% of respondents commit to 2-5 rounds of review before finalizing proposals.

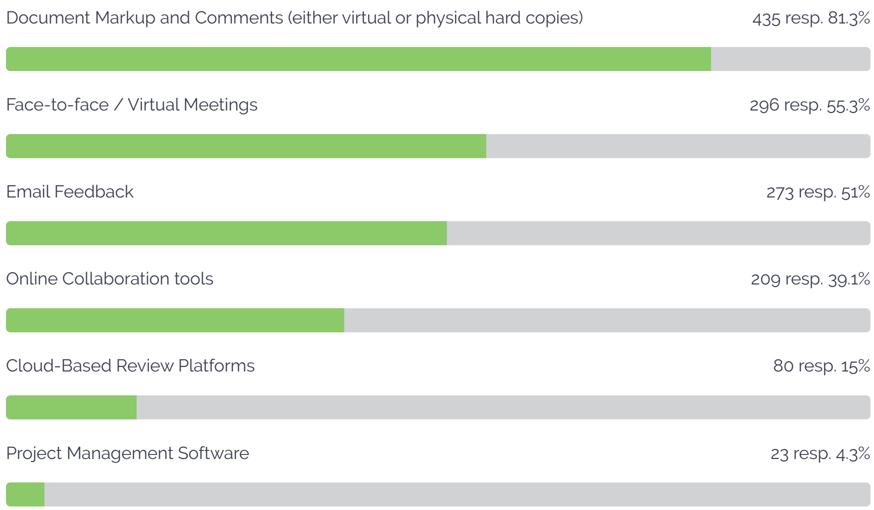
How many rounds of reviews during the proposal process is considered 'standard'?



How are revisions carried out?

- The majority of survey respondents use document markups to handle feedback on proposals **(81%)** either virtual or hard copies.
- The next two highest responses are **'Face to Face' Meetings (55%)** and **'Email Feedback' (51%)**.

How are proposal reviews carried out?

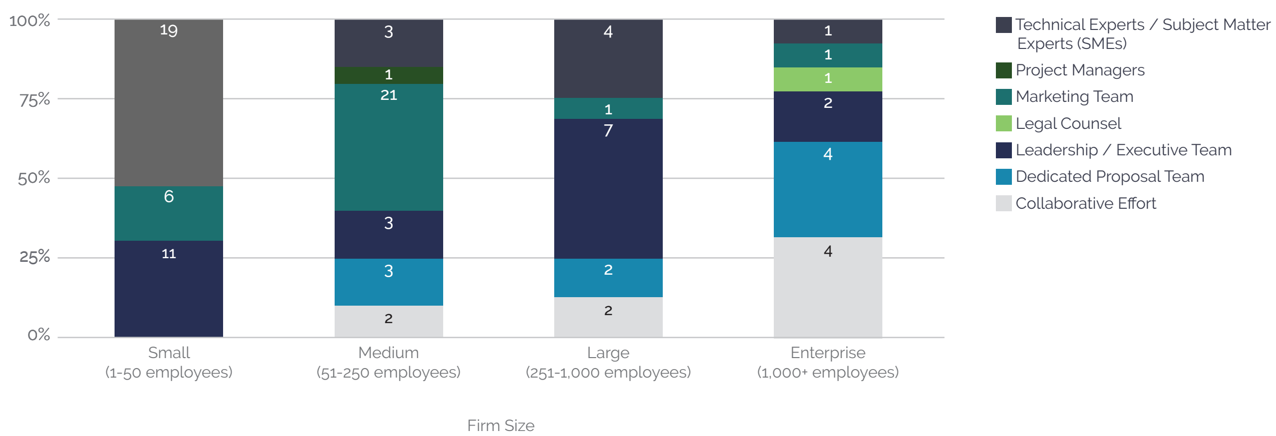


Note: OpenAsset has removed responses of "other" in the displayed data for clarity.

Who is required to review proposals?

- When asked which teams are required to review proposals, the top selected answers were:
  - **67%** Marketing Team
  - **60%** Leadership / Executive Team
  - **56%** Technical Teams/Technical Experts
  - **49%** Dedicated Proposal Team
- This was a multi-select question, and the responses suggest that proposals must go through multiple layers of approvals, which explains why it is often difficult for these teams to submit proposals earlier than the day of a given due date,
- When broken down by firm size, the data suggests that Legal Counsel is more involved in proposal reviews for Enterprise clients, compared to smaller firms which may not have this expertise.
- Smaller firms who answered this question marked 'Technical Experts' as the most common people who must review proposals.

Who is required to review proposals? By Firm Size



Who determines when a proposal is completed?

- The majority of respondents cited the Leadership/Executive Team **(33%)** and Marketing Team **(32%)** as having the final say on when a proposal is completed.
- The third most selected choice was 'Dedicated Proposal Team' at **(21%)**.

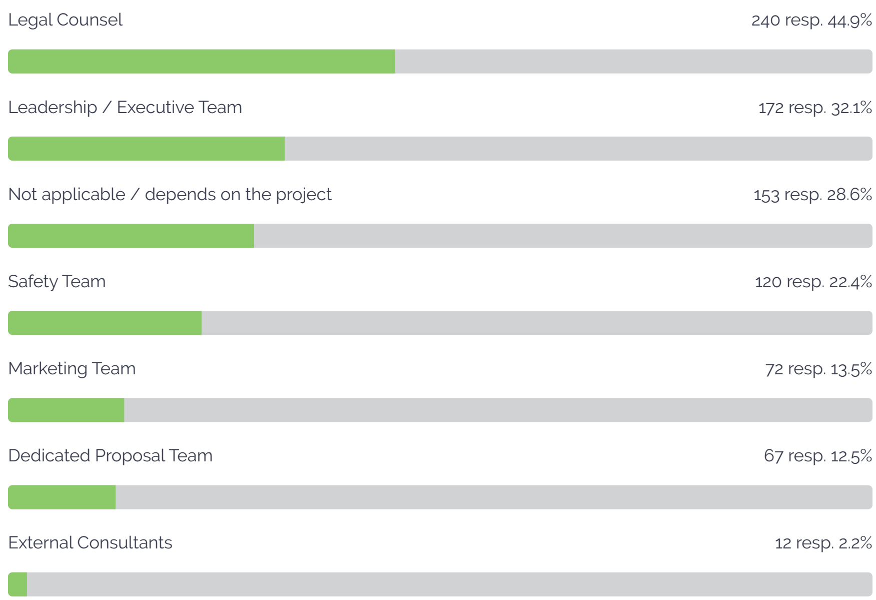
Responsibility of Accuracy

- **71%** of participants reported that the Marketing Team is responsible for the accuracy of the proposals (only **22%** of Technical Experts or Subject Matter Experts were considered held responsible).

Legal, Health & Safety Checks

- Legal Counsel **(45%)** and 'Leadership/Executive Team' **(32%)** were the top two answers for who is responsible for these checks.
- Only **22%** of our respondents selected specifically a 'Safety Team'.

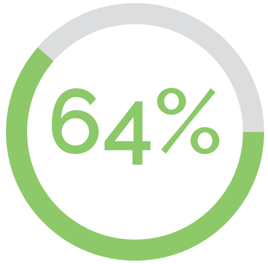
Who is responsible for legal and health & safety review?



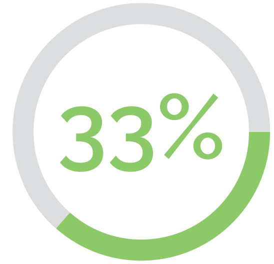
Note: OpenAsset has removed responses of "other" in the displayed data for clarity.

When Are Proposals Submitted?

- The majority of participants (64%) submit proposals on the day of the deadline with one-third stating they are being submitted 1-3 days before the deadline.
- This is an industry norm across all industries, sizes, and marketing team sizes.



The majority of participants submit proposals on the day of the deadline

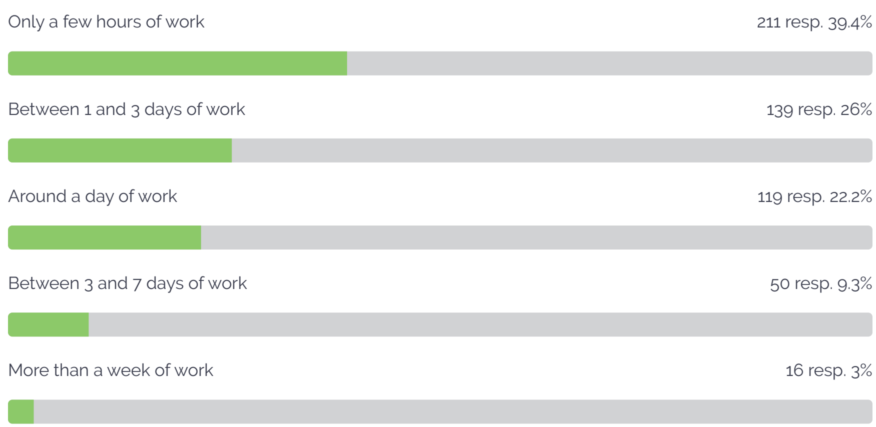


Only one-third stating they are submitting 1-3 days before the deadline

Time Spent on RFI's (Request for Information))

- RFIs vary on the reported time spent. Many survey respondents reported RFIs only taking a few hours of work **(39.4%)**, with **over 40%** claiming it takes anywhere from around **one day of work to 3 days of work**.
- This finding was consistent across firm size and marketing team size.

How much time does your marketing team spend on an RFI?



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Key Insights:

- Proposal "Review" periods last from **1-5 rounds on average** amongst our respondents, and the marketing team bears the highest responsibility **(71.4%)** for the accuracy of proposals, followed by technical experts. This indicates that while technical accuracy is important, overall proposal quality is primarily the responsibility of the marketing team.
- Manual methods of review are common, regardless of the size of the company or marketing team (e.g. emails and mark-ups on documents vs. project management tools or review software). This reliance on manual review methods like document markups and face-to-face meetings suggests a huge **opportunity for streamlining the review process through collaboration workflows or specialized software, especially for teams navigating multiple rounds of proposal review and approval**.
- The data supports that there is a collaborative effort across marketing, leadership, and technical experts in the review process. Legal counsel and consultants are considered, depending on the firm's resources.
- Marketing teams are submitting items on the day of the deadline. These teams are rarely "ahead" of the deadlines by more than a few days. The prevalence of last-minute proposal submissions also indicates potential challenges in time management and resource allocation within marketing teams. Addressing these challenges could improve efficiency and reduce the stress associated with tight deadlines. **Teams should consider prioritizing efficiency in the data/file collection portion of proposal creation, which takes considerable time to complete without a proper process and tool.**

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Final Takeaways

Overall, the survey results highlight the critical role of proposals in AEC marketing and the need for:

1. **There is a growing need for improved content management systems and collaboration tools:**

- The survey data emphasizes a reliance on scattered content sources (previous proposals, Word docs, etc.) which can be inefficient and error-prone.
- Implementing a centralized content management system (CMS) would allow for easy access, version control, and searchability of existing content.
- Collaboration tools and proper digital asset management tools would facilitate smoother teamwork between marketing, proposal writers, and other departments involved in the process.

2. **Investment in content creation tools and templates pays dividends:**

- The data indicates a significant use of boilerplate content, suggesting a need for readily available, high-quality proposal components.
- As competition among form submissions increases, investing in content creation tools (e.g., for graphics, and data visualization) can elevate the visual impact of proposals and differentiate firms.
- Developing standardized proposal templates with pre-populated sections and pre-approved language would save time and ensure brand consistency for teams managing high-pressure proposal deadlines.

3. **Standardized project management processes expedite delivery times:**

- The survey data revealed inconsistencies in how proposals are managed across different projects. Standardized project management processes would establish clear steps, deadlines, and roles for each proposal stage.
- This would enhance efficiency, prevent bottlenecks, and ensure all proposals receive the necessary attention.

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4. Proposal success relies on streamlined workflows and multi-team collaboration:

- The reliance on the marketing team alone for content creation suggests a potential lack of streamlined workflows.
- Streamlining workflows involves clearly defined steps for each team involved (marketing, proposal writers, technical teams) to contribute their expertise at the right time.
- Improved collaboration tools can help to facilitate seamless communication and feedback exchange throughout the proposal development process.

5. Elevating brand consistency relies on expediting and centralizing the approval process:

- The survey results indicate a lack of centralized approval processes for proposals, potentially leading to inconsistencies with brand guidelines.
- Establishing a central approval process would ensure all proposals adhere to the company's brand voice, visual identity, and messaging.
- This could involve designated reviewers or a review board with the authority to approve final proposals.

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The survey results paint a clear picture: **the AEC industry relies heavily on proposals for success, yet current practices are inconsistent and can lead to growing firm inefficiencies**. Scattered content, inconsistent workflows, and a lack of centralized control hinder proposal quality and turnaround times.

The good news? These challenges all have solutions. By implementing a robust Digital Asset Management (DAM) system like OpenAsset, AEC firms can establish a central hub for storing, organizing, and sharing proposal content. Our goal is to help AEC marketing teams easily find pre-approved marketing materials, collaborate seamlessly with team members, and ensure brand consistency with every submission.

Real-World Impact with OpenAsset

XL CONSTRUCTION

Key Achievements

- Reduced proposal creation time by **50%**
- Impressive **90%+** internal adoption rate

rjc

Key Achievements

- **10+** hours saved per week searching for assets
- **20+** hours saved for week on proposal creation

CORGAN

Key Achievements

- Successfully adopted by **50%** of 600+ employees
- **80%** reduction in time spent on proposal creation

Book a demo of OpenAsset today and discover how to simplify your firm's proposal process.