

# The Savvy Proposal Pro's Guide:

## A Do's and Don'ts Checklist

### When writing a strong proposal, DO:

- ✓ **Make the proposal about the client starting on page one.**
  - The first sentence of the cover letter demonstrates your understanding of the client, their project, their goals, or challenges.
  - Every page clearly relates back to the client – show relevance in callout boxes, with bold text, or bullet points.
  - All content shows that you have done your research and understand the needs of the client.
  - Highlight benefits and the value your organization offers.
- ✓ **Tell stories.**
  - People have stories. Revamp resumes to let your staff's personalities shine through.
  - Projects have stories. It's not just a building; it's the heart of the community. It's not just a bridge; it's an important connection between neighborhoods. Whatever "it" is, there's a story behind it.
  - Clients have stories. Your past clients had personal motivations that influenced projects – can you tell those stories? The client you're submitting this proposal to is personally invested in this project – can you speak to how you'll help them shape their project and the story it will tell?
- ✓ **Recognize the importance of presentation.**
  - Make sure your proposal is easy to read by using clear and consistent formatting like headings, subheadings, bullet points, and callout boxes.
  - Make navigation easy with titles and headings that clearly align with the RFP, or include the RFP questions in your response.
  - Use the same color palette, fonts, and design schemes throughout the document.
  - Use impactful graphics and imagery to convey ideas.
- ✓ **Feel cohesive, put together, and polished.**
  - Edit for clarity and conciseness.
  - Embrace white space.
  - Proofread and edit.
  - Follow the formatting and submission guidelines outlined in the RFP.
- ✓ **Include curated images that support the story.**
  - Use images that will resonate with the client and relate to their project. (The award-winning "money shot" isn't always the image that's going to speak to the reviewer.)

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### When writing a strong proposal, DON'T:



#### **Force a message or build a strategy on assumptions.**

- Don't assume that a challenge for you is a concern for the client. (They might think their budget or schedule is completely reasonable!)
- Don't build a strategy around information you haven't verified



#### **Include irrelevant information in the hopes that something "sticks" with the client.**

- Don't assume the reviewer will understand the relevance of something you've included in your proposal.
- Don't include project descriptions or experiences that don't clearly relate to the client's project



#### **Start with a past proposal and update the client/project name.**

- Don't use generic "one-size-fits-all" proposals. The reviewer will be able to tell.
- Don't forget to check that you've used the correct client and project name in your document.



#### **Lose focus.**

- Avoid using technical jargon that the reader may not understand.
- Don't make unrealistic promises or exaggerate claims in your proposal.
- Avoid lengthy, confusing sentences.



#### **Forget to proofread/edit!**

- Don't submit a proposal with typos, grammatical errors, or formatting issues.
- Don't wait until the last minute to develop your proposal – you won't have time to review it!