

DARE TO WIN

FOUR KEYS TO CRAFTING WINNING PROPOSALS

*"Your proposal isn't about you.
It's about what you can do for *them*."*

By Lisa Rehurek

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"In the world of proposals, clarity and creativity are your power duo. Use them to cut through the noise."

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INTRODUCTION

When I first stepped into the role of proposal manager for a small specialty practice within a global consulting firm, my understanding of how to win state government RFPs was narrow. Like many, I assumed that success boiled down to a simple formula: answer the questions, comply with the requirements, and hit the submission deadline. It didn't take long to realize that this view was both limited and, frankly, risky.



Through trial and error, I discovered that winning an RFP requires much more than just ticking boxes. It's a process that demands strategy, creativity, and a deep understanding of what the client truly values. As I navigated through multiple proposals, I developed a framework that allowed my team to not only comply but to truly stand out in a crowded and competitive field. This framework became what I call the DARE methodology.

"Success doesn't come from checking boxes; it comes from connecting dots."

In this eBook, I'll share with you the lessons I learned and how the DARE methodology was born. This approach is designed to give small businesses like yours a competitive edge, helping you create proposals that don't just meet requirements but inspire confidence and trust. Let's get started on turning your next RFP opportunity into a winning one.

WHY YOU NEED THE DARE METHODOLOGY



Winning a Request for Proposal (RFP) is more than just filling out paperwork; it's about crafting a compelling narrative that positions your business as the perfect fit.

In this eBook, I'll walk you through my DARE methodology and the four key areas that drive consistently winning proposals.

I've turned these key areas into the **DARE** acronym to help you remember. Each letter stands for:

Distinction

Answering the Questions

Requirements

Evidence & Authority

These are the critical building blocks of a successful proposal, and when combined, they form a strategy that will put you ahead of the competition.

D.

Distinction

“Distinction is not an option; it’s the secret ingredient that turns a good proposal into a game-changer.”

STANDING OUT IN A CROWDED MARKETPLACE

Distinction is all about what sets you apart from your competitors. Every RFP you respond to is likely being evaluated against several other responses. If your proposal looks, sounds, or feels like everyone else’s, you’ll easily blend in and be overlooked.

Meeting the qualifications and requirements of an RFP is just the baseline. To stand out in a crowded field of competitors, you must distinguish your solution by clearly articulating the unique value you bring to the table.

This means demonstrating a deep understanding of the client’s pain points and offering a solution that goes beyond the expected, positioning your organization as the obvious choice.

In this chapter, you’ll learn how to differentiate your business by emphasizing how to show distinction.



KEY ELEMENTS OF DISTINCTION

Unique Value Proposition (UVP)

Highlight what you offer that no one else does. Whether it's a proprietary process, exceptional customer service, or unbeatable pricing, make your UVP clear and compelling.

Tailored Solutions

Show the client that you understand their specific needs by customizing your proposal to speak directly to their pain points. Be a thought leader and demonstrate that you have the specific knowledge and solution they need.

Brand Voice

Ensure your brand's personality comes through in your writing. Be consistent in tone, whether it's professional, approachable, or innovative.



Example 1:

Imagine you're responding to an RFP for a website redesign. While most agencies will list their services, you can stand out by including a case study about a previous client whose sales skyrocketed after you redesigned their site. Not only does this show your expertise, but it also shows measurable impact.



“When your proposal stands out, it doesn’t just get noticed; it gets remembered.”

Example 2:

You’re bidding on an RFP for providing cybersecurity services to a large corporation. Instead of listing generic solutions, you include an exclusive feature: your proprietary AI-driven security software that identifies threats 30% faster than conventional tools. This distinction clearly sets you apart from competitors who rely on standard, off-the-shelf solutions.

Example 3:

Your firm is applying to manage a marketing campaign. Instead of focusing solely on the number of campaigns you’ve executed, you highlight that your team includes former employees from Google and Facebook, bringing insider knowledge of digital marketing best practices. You emphasize how your team’s background offers a unique perspective not commonly found among competitors.

THE ART OF DIRECT AND RELEVANT RESPONSES

Answering the questions might seem obvious, but this is where many proposals fail. The key here is not just answering, but answering for impact. Too often, businesses provide vague or incomplete responses, leaving evaluators with more questions than answers.

In this chapter, you'll be introduced to the strategic side of answering the questions.

“Don’t just tell them what you do; show them why it matters.”

A.

Answering the Questions for Impact



KEY ELEMENTS OF ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS

Focus on the Solution, Not on You

While the questions in an RFP may seem to focus on your company's capabilities, your answers should focus on the client's needs. By framing your responses in terms of how your solution addresses their specific challenges and goals, you shift the focus from just talking about your expertise to demonstrating its relevance to them. It's not about what you can do; it's about what you can do for **them**.

Mirror the Language

Use the client's language when answering their questions. If the RFP asks for a "risk mitigation plan," your response should specifically mention "risk mitigation," not just "risk management."

Be Comprehensive

Ensure every aspect of the question is addressed. Break down multi-part questions and answer each piece thoroughly.

Avoid Jargon

While you want to demonstrate expertise, don't drown your proposal in technical language unless it's required. Keep your responses clear and accessible.

"Don't forget there's a human being reading your proposal."

Keep the Reader in Mind

You don't want to bore, confuse, or overwhelm the evaluator. When you do any of those three things, you won't keep their attention and they will give you mediocre evaluation points at best.



Example 1:

An RFP asks, "What steps will you take to ensure project deadlines are met?" A weak response would be: "We will ensure deadlines are met through effective project management."

A strong response would be: "Our approach to meeting deadlines includes a three-phase timeline:

- 1) Initial planning and scope setting with the client,*
- 2) Ongoing check-ins and milestone reviews every two weeks, and*
- 3) Use of project management software to track tasks, responsibilities, and deadlines in real-time.*

***"You are not writing to an RFP.
You are communicating with an evaluator."***



Example 2:

An RFP asks, "How will your company handle unexpected delays or project setbacks?"

A weak response might be: "We will work hard to mitigate delays."

A strong response would be: "Our team anticipates potential setbacks during the planning phase and develops contingency plans to address them."

For example, we allocate 15% buffer time in the project timeline and implement real-time project tracking software that sends alerts if key milestones are at risk. This allows us to take corrective action immediately."

Example 3:

An RFP asks, "What steps will you take to ensure data privacy?"

A weak response: "We will comply with privacy laws."

A strong response: "Our team follows GDPR and HIPAA compliance standards, regularly undergoes third-party audits, and uses encryption protocols such as AES-256 to ensure data privacy. In addition, we provide all staff with mandatory data protection training to mitigate human error."

"Never leave the evaluator guessing. Clear, specific, and direct responses win proposals."



MAKING YOUR PROPOSAL EASY TO EVALUATE

Even the strongest solution can lose impact if the evaluator has to work too hard to understand it. Readability is about presenting your ideas in a way that is clear, organized, and easy to absorb.

A readable proposal helps evaluators quickly find what they need, understand your value, and connect your approach to the results they care about.

Clear writing, thoughtful structure, and purposeful formatting reduce confusion and strengthen your message.

This chapter focuses on creating a proposal that is easy to read, easy to navigate, and easy to score.

R.

Readability

“Making evaluators work to understand your proposal is like hiding the finish line. They cannot reward what they can’t clearly see.”

KEY ELEMENTS OF READABILITY

Make it Easy to Scan

Evaluators often review proposals under tight deadlines. Use clear headings, short paragraphs, bullets, and purposeful formatting to help them quickly find the information they need.

Keep the Writing Clear

Avoid unnecessary jargon, long sentences, and complicated explanations. Communicate your ideas in straightforward language so the evaluator can understand your approach the first time they read it.

Guide the Evaluator

Organize information in a logical order and create clear connections between the client's needs, your solution, and the expected outcomes. Never make the evaluator work to figure out why your response matters.

“Clarity is a competitive advantage; the easier your proposal is to understand, the easier it is to score.”



Example 1: Make it Easy to Scan

A proposal describes a five-step implementation process. Instead of burying the steps in a long paragraph, use a numbered list with a short heading and explanation for each step. This helps the evaluator quickly understand the approach and confirm that every phase is covered.

Example 2: Keep the Writing Clear

Instead of writing, “Our organization will leverage a multifaceted methodology to facilitate stakeholder alignment,” write, “We will meet with key stakeholders to confirm priorities, responsibilities, and next steps.” The clearer version communicates the same idea without unnecessary jargon.

Example 3: Guide the Evaluator

When describing a feature or service, immediately connect it to the client’s desired outcome. For example: “Our real-time reporting dashboard gives your team immediate visibility into project status, helping you identify delays early and keep the project on schedule.”

“A readable proposal does not make the evaluator hunt for your value, it puts the answer exactly where they need it.”

PROVING YOU CAN DELIVER

A strong proposal doesn't just tell. It **shows**. Evidence and Authority come from proving your experience, reliability, and expertise. The best way to build confidence is through hard data, testimonials, and third-party validation.

Winning trust is crucial, and the most effective way to build credibility is through evidence and authority. This means backing up your claims with relevant case studies, testimonials, performance metrics, and examples that prove you've successfully delivered on similar projects.

By establishing yourself as an authority, you reduce perceived risks and increase the client's confidence in your ability to deliver.

"Let your accomplishments do the shouting for you."



E.
**Evidence
and Authority**

D.A.R.E. Methodology

KEY ELEMENTS OF EVIDENCE & AUTHORITY

Case Studies

Provide detailed case studies that showcase past successes. Highlight the challenge, your approach, and the measurable results.

Testimonials and References

Include quotes from satisfied clients and offer references who can speak to your credibility.

Certifications and Awards

Demonstrate your industry recognition by listing relevant certifications, awards, or accolades that lend credibility to your proposal.

Thought Leadership

Showcasing your industry thought leadership in a proposal elevates your credibility by positioning you as an expert who understands the landscape and challenges facing potential clients. When you share insights, innovative ideas, and proven strategies, you not only demonstrate your depth of knowledge but also build trust with decision-makers.

"Your client may not take your word for it but they will trust the numbers and stories from people like them."



Example 1:

If you're submitting a proposal for IT consulting services, include a case study where your team helped a similar-sized business reduce downtime by 40% and saved them \$200,000 annually.

Example 2:

You're submitting a proposal for digital transformation. You might include a statement such as:

For instance, our recent white paper, "Navigating Digital Disruption: Strategies for Sustainable Growth," outlines key strategies that have helped companies like [Client A] and [Client B] successfully pivot during times of uncertainty. Our research indicates that businesses that invest in agile methodologies are 30% more likely to outperform their competitors in the next five years.

By leveraging our industry insights and proven methodologies, we are uniquely positioned to help you navigate these challenges. Our commitment to thought leadership ensures that we bring the latest trends and best practices to your project, providing you with a strategic advantage.

Example 3:

You're submitting a proposal for a government contract to deliver IT services. In addition to listing your years of experience, you include certifications like ISO 27001 for information security management and a letter of recommendation from a previous government client. This validates your past success in delivering a project of similar scale and complexity on time and under budget.

CONCLUSION:

DARE TO WIN

"Winning proposals don't just tell a story, they prove why you're the only logical choice."

"Mastering the DARE methodology isn't just about increasing your chances of winning proposals. It's about consistently delivering value to clients and setting your business apart. By focusing on Distinction, Answering the Questions, Requirements, and Evidence & Authority, you'll not only meet RFP criteria, but you'll also exceed expectations and win more contracts."



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



An expert in RFP strategy and proposal writing, Lisa Rehurek has helped businesses secure millions in contracts through compelling, client-focused proposals.

This eBook distills years of experience into actionable insights to help you win your next proposal with confidence.

Lisa Rehurek is a multi-award winning CEO, a 2x Inc 5000 recipient, a SaaS founder, a best-selling author, an award-winning podcast host, and a speaker/trainer. She lives in Tempe, Arizona with her two dogs, Oliver and Tuckaroo.