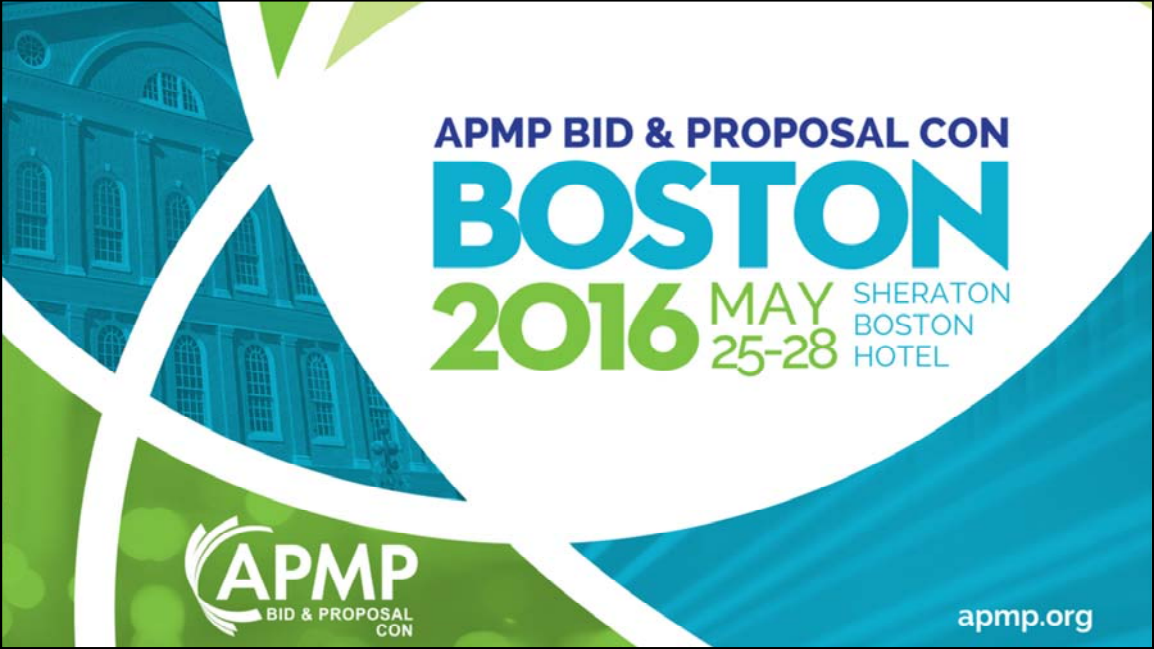
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The APBs of persuasive proposal writing for reluctant writers, enigmatic engineers, and circuitous SMEs

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Agenda

- The problem: reluctant writers, enigmatic engineers, and circuitous SMEs
- The goal: to develop outstanding proposal text
- The solution: the APB approach to writing
- Fitting approach, process, benefits into the writing process
  - APB Adaptations
  - Q&A

The Problem

Writers assigned to proposals often:

- Are overwhelmed by the process and effort involved
- Include plenty of detail and technical diagrams, but confuse readers or exceed page budgets
- Don't thoroughly check for compliance
  - Cut and paste from prior bids

APB for writer

- **Proposal Managers:** Learn a method to teach your proposal writing teams and SMEs for consistent content.
- **Writers:** APB helps with
  - **Getting started**—it's not just a blank page anymore!
  - **Drafting**—APB gives you a plan and structure
  - **Revising**—you can review each paragraph in your own and others' texts to see if they are fulfilling the criteria of APB

How the gov't evaluates proposals

The factors that distinguish between a **GREEN** proposal and a **BLUE** proposal are:

- **Strengths:** Relevant features and benefits that exceed requirements and/or provide added value
- **Weaknesses/Deficiencies:** Failure to address requirements
- **Risks:** Potential threats to schedule/cost/quality or factors which may increase need for government oversight

Maximize strengths, minimize risks and weaknesses, and eliminate all deficiencies

The Goal

Your proposal should exhibit:

- Compliant structure
- Responsive content
- Customer-focused text
- Compelling and feature-rich text
- Easy to evaluate structure
- Visual communications
- *Well-written, easy-to-read text*

Scoring your proposals against 7 quality factors leads to "outstanding" proposal text

The Solution: APB

A writing model to consistently, clearly, and comprehensively respond to requirements:

A Approach Summary

P Process

B Benefits

Approach Summary

- 1 – 3 sentences that summarize your approach and preview benefits
- Don't parrot the government's language, but do mimic their vocabulary
- Should contain all necessary high-level information a "skimmer" evaluator needs

Using RFP key words at the beginning of paragraphs is a sign post for evaluators that says, "Stop, and read here!"

Process

Several sentences to full paragraphs detailing how you will do the work:

- Features of your solution
- LCATS that will do work
- Step-by-step process
- Interdependencies
- Tools that will be used
- Risk and quality controls
- Diagrams and graphics

Detail is what allows the government to award strengths and minimizes risks and weaknesses

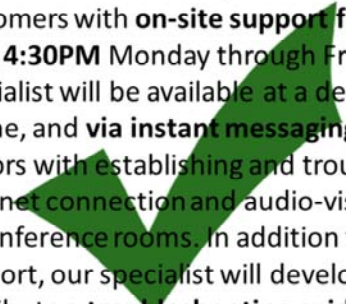
Process [cont.]

Your process section must tell the government ***how*** you will do the work, not merely ***what*** you intend to accomplish

Process example

Our on-site customer support specialist will assist visitors with all technology related requests, including establishing and troubleshooting internet connection and setting up audio-visual equipment in conference rooms.

Our customer service specialist will assist customers with **on-site support from 7:30AM until 4:30PM** Monday through Friday. Our specialist will be available at a desk, over the phone, and **via instant messaging** to assist all visitors with establishing and troubleshooting internet connection and audio-visual equipment in conference rooms. In addition to personal support, our specialist will develop, display, and distribute a **troubleshooting guide** for commonly encountered issues.



Benefits

Conclude paragraph or section with 1 – 3 sentences that clearly explain how the process fulfills the approach and yields the stated benefits:

- Zoom back out to big picture
- Make logical connections for reader

A good benefits section can practically be lifted out of your proposal and into the source selection justification text

APB paragraph compare and contrast

Requirement:

Protect a wood deck for at least 5 years

Non-APB paragraphs

Option 1: We will protect your wood deck for at least 5 years with industry best tools and equipment.

Option 2: Two of our senior carpenters will protect your wood deck for at least 5 years by applying two coats of Behr waterproof stain with a three-inch bristle brush.

An APB paragraph

A We will protect the deck for 10 years by applying two coats of waterproof stain with tools to deeply penetrate the wood.

P Two of our senior carpenters will use a three-inch bristle brush to apply two coats of Behr waterproof stain in dark brown. The bristle brush penetrates the wood, whereas spray painting simply sits on top of the wood.

B Because our carpenters use a bristle brush, your deck will be protected for 10 years, twice the minimum requirement.

Exercise: Build your own APB paragraph

Requirement	Solution	Features	Benefits	Proof points
Build a wooden ladder that will last for at least 5 years	• 1 senior carpenter • Hickory wood • Behr waterproof stain	• Very strong wood • Long-lasting finish that protects against weather	• Reduced possibility of breaking or damage compared to other popular materials • Ladder can be used indoor and outdoor	• Built a step stool using the same wood and stain for another customer and it was 12 years until they had to repair it.

Exercise: Build your own APB paragraph

Take the next 5 minutes to create an outline or rough draft of an APB paragraph that answers the criteria and portrays your company's solution.

An APB paragraph

A We will build a versatile, wooden ladder using durable materials that will last beyond 5 years.

P One of our senior carpenters will build the ladder according to your specifications using hickory wood. After the ladder is built, he will use a three-inch bristle brush to apply two coats of Behr waterproof stain in dark brown.

An APB paragraph

Because our carpenters applied a waterproof stain, your ladder will be protected from the elements for 10 years, which allows indoor and outdoor use of the ladder for twice the minimum requirement. Additionally, hickory wood is one of the densest woods available, which means a longer-lasting ladder. In fact, we built a hickory step stool for another customer that lasted for 12 years of daily use before needing any repairs.

How APB fits into the writing process

1. Solution development

   Big picture and supporting artifacts (i.e., tables strategy and features/benefits/proof points)

Reqmt	Solution	Features	Benefits	Proof Points
Protect deck for 5 years	•Behr stain •Bristle Brush •2 Sr. Carpenters	•Behr stain •Bristle brush	10 years of protection	Deck stained using this methodology 7 years ago is protected and going strong

How APB fits into the writing process [cont.]

2. Outline the requirements
   - Organize the PWS requirements into a plan for your paragraphs
   - Depending on client, you may or may not need an "understanding" section or an introduction section
   - Do not deviate from the organization set forth section L of the instructions

Example

Manage Submission of Congressional Report

The contractor shall

- Conduct quality reviews
- Create a schedule
- Identify required information
- Write a compliant response
- Analyze the requirements
- Build a shared document repository

Example

Manage Submission of Congressional Report

Preparation

- The contractor shall analyze requirements
- The contractor shall create a schedule
- The contractor shall establish shared document repository

Creation

- The contractor shall identify required information
- Write a complaint response

Review cycle

- The contractor shall conduct quality reviews

Outlining the Requirements Exercise

Review the L&M requirements in the handout and then organize the shall statements of PWS 5.2 to build an outline of the requirements for your response.

Outlining the Requirements Exercise

3. Create an annotated outline and draft graphics within your chunked up requirements

POST-MEETING SUPPORT

- and finalizing and distributing those minutes as directed within the schedule established by the requestor (Deliverable 08, Deliverable 09).
- tracking actions items
- capturing lessons learned

A: The project analyst will draft and distribute notes and share links to the the action-item tracker and lesson-learned database in SharePoint (no added cost) within the agreed-upon timeframe and follow-up on the status of action items prior to the next meeting.

P:

- Draft minutes and distribute meeting minutes within agreed-upon timeframe
- Record action items into an spreadsheet tracker and follow-up with action item owners to update tracker as needed prior to next meeting
- Record lessons-learned into an spreadsheet database, coding the lessons learned for easy categorization and future reference
- Store lessons-learned, action items, and notes on a SP site (no added cost to government) for attendee's convenience
- Create workspaces on SP site to facilitate action-items

B: Our approach makes for timely, accurate, organized notes and materials that keep attendees on track

- SharePoint site allows for central access and collaboration on action items at no added cost to government
- Notes organized in alignment with agenda make it easy for those who didn't attend to catch up.
- Excel sheets to track action items and lessons learned allow for easy management and follow-up of action items and facilitates cataloguing and future reference of lessons-learned.

How APB fits into the writing process [cont.]

4. Review outline/section concept
   - Vet your approach in DRFP reviews or your company's color review
5. Begin drafting, reviewing, revising processes
   - Enter your company's color team process for finalizing the proposal text

APB adaptations: scaling

- APB can be broken into three or more paragraphs instead of one paragraph
- For shorter sections or simpler requirements, APB may only take a few sentences instead of a lengthy paragraph

Scale APB up or down to meet the level of detail the requirements and page budget dictate

APB adaptations: LPTA

- APB relevance:
  - it ensures compliance
  - Perpetuates positive impression with the client
  - Easy for the customer to evaluate
- Alteration:
  - Focus text & time on process and less on approach and benefits

Follow the APB process for compliance, but focus time and text on Process text

APB adaptations: past performance

- APB relevance:
  - Evaluators still want to know the approach, process, and benefits yielded
  - In the technical approach, APB is a promise; in past performance, APB describes what was already implemented
- Alteration:
  - APB structure is not applicable for past performance

Apply the tenants (not the structure) of APB to past performance; create a story of implemented APB

APB adaptations: resumes

- APB relevance:
  - Include a brief description of the approach taken in each job along with any benefits delivered to the client, so long as they are relevant to the PWS requirements
- Alteration:
  - APB structure is not applicable for resumes

Apply the tenants (not the structure) of APB to past performance; create a story of implemented APB

APB Summary

- You need to make it easy for the evaluators to score your proposal
- Plan for how you're going to respond to ALL shall statements before writing
- Outline your approach statement, process points, and benefit to the customer
  - Draft text that makes it easy for the evaluator to find strengths

Plan, outline, and draft text that puts an APB out on your strengths

APB Benefits

- Makes proposal writing easy for new writers or writers who are overwhelmed
- Increases writing quality of proposal text, allowing reviewers to focus on content
- Increases consistency across sections/volumes, which decreases one-voice editing time

Using APB approach builds quality into proposals instead of trying to engineer quality at the end

Questions

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