

# TUTORIAL #31

## Is it useful to have my proposal reviewed before submitting it?

Companies often ask “Is it useful to have my proposal reviewed before submitting the application to DOE?” The simple answer to this question is “Absolutely”. No matter how skilled you are as a proposal writer – it is always beneficial to have someone else review a draft of what you have prepared. To take advantage of this review however – you must do it early enough so that you have time to make changes in response to the feedback that you receive. You also have to ask the right people to be reviewers; provide them with the information needed; and be open to their feedback. That’s a tall order – especially the last part!

Sometimes you will hear people that work in “capture planning” differentiate between “pink team” and “red team” reviewers. I find this to be a useful distinction. In Tutorial 7 we reviewed how proposals are reviewed by the Department of Energy and made mention of the fact that 9% of the DOE Phase I SBIR/STTR proposals are rejected because of failure to comply with the guidelines provided in the Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA). The “Pink team’s” primary role is to assure that this doesn’t happen. They check for compliance, correctness, spelling and grammar. In order to do this, the proposer must send the pink team a copy of the FOA in advance of their review so that they can become very familiar with the format that this program requires. As companies mature and begin to write more and more proposals, these functions often become intrinsic to the proposal preparation process that the company develops. The pink team should also raise questions about the appropriateness of the team and facilities.

Now the “red team” is a different matter. The red team<sup>1</sup> is intended to take the perspective of DOE’s Merit reviewers and apply the evaluation criteria that are articulated in the Funding Oppor-

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.fedmarket.com/contractors/Red-Team-Review-Guidelines->

tunity Announcement.

*“The technical topic of the FOA and provide sufficient information to convince DOE and members of the research community who review the application that it is worthy of support under the stated evaluation criteria in Part V.”*

DOE plans to make selections for Phase I awards from those applications judged to have the highest overall merit within their technical program area, with equal consideration given to each of the following criteria:

1. *Strength of the Scientific/Technical Approach*
2. *Ability to carry out the project in an efficient manner, and*
3. *Impact*

In order to assume this perspective, the red team reviewers [usually 3 or 4 people] must be knowledgeable about the technical area of interest to DOE. In selecting members of the red team, you need to come as close as you can to that perspective.

How can you find potential red team reviewers? If you are affiliated with a University, approach subject matter experts who work in this field. You can also ask colleagues and mentors that you respect and which have some familiarity with this space. Ideally they would have had some experience with government proposal writing – but they should NOT have had a hand in developing this specific proposal. You need to allow the red team sufficient time to review the draft and for you to make changes. Therefore, I would recommend scheduling a Kick-Off phone call with the red team about 10 days before the proposal is due. I often schedule such a call on a Friday and then schedule a Feedback session the following Monday, as it is often convenient for people to review over the weekend.

For the red team orientation, I prepare a PowerPoint presentation that explains the constraints of the proposal [page numbers, point size], the due date, and highlight the Merit Review Criteria. The red team must have this information – as this is the perspective that you are asking them to take. I also clarify the “win themes” that I have highlighted in my response<sup>2</sup> so that I can see if my message comes across effectively. I close the orientation by providing them with a copy of the solicitation and a copy of a well-developed, almost final draft. When we meet the following Monday for the feedback session, each member of the red team is asked to provide feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal relative to the merit review criteria.

Feedback is often hard to take, especially as you have been working hard on the proposal and probably believe that it is very compelling. Don't react while gathering feedback. Listen, take notes, ask for suggestions and then consider how to modify your proposal. Then please address those modifications with enough time to submit your application in a timely manner.

In Tutorial 10 we introduced various state Phase 0 programs, many of which partner with the DOE Phase 0 program to provide proposal review services. Be sure to take advantage of these services and reach out as early as possible to those in your area to see if you can line up appropriate reviewers. Mention that you are applying for a DOE Phase I award and ask if they could recommend an appropriate person to review your proposal.

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2 <http://www.captureplanning.com/articles/86952.cfm>