GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE RESPONSE PREPARATION

This guide harnesses insights from more than 25 years in innovation services and is intended for those who are new to responding to innovation projects, anyone who just needs a quick refresher or those looking to improve their response preparations.

THE GOAL AND HOW TO GET THERE

Some might think that the goal of a response to an innovation project is a contract with the client. It's much more basic than that:

The goal of your response is to attract the attention and interest of the client.

Everything you include in your response must support that goal. Why? Because the contract comes after you get their attention and only after you discuss issues like compensation, duration, intellectual property and more. In short, if you don't gain the client's interest, you don't even get to the point of discussing what a contract might look like.

So, how do you get the client's attention and interest? By preparing a compelling and engaging narrative about what sets your technology or expertise apart, introducing yourself or your technology in such a way that the client can't help but be interested in learning more, and telling the client a story that they want to read.

YOUR AUDIENCE

It's likely that many people will read your response to an innovation project, each with their own interests. Craft a response that is equally persuasive for any of those reviewers. By making your proposal accessible to a broad array of reviewers, it's more likely that all reviewers will have a good understanding of your approach.

THE NARRATIVE

A compelling narrative gives the audience just enough information, in the right format and at the right time.

- Don't overwhelm your audience with too much information
- Use broadly accessible language and terminology
- Have a logical flow from one point to another

CONTENT CONSIDERATIONS

- **Non-Confidential Information:** All information you include in your response must be non-confidential in nature. This includes any supplementary files you append to your response form: pamphlets, slide decks, videos, etc. Be sure to review all the information in your response, and make sure none of the content is confidential or labeled as confidential. Having confidential information can delay the processing of your submission or may even result in its disqualification.

- **Self-Contained:** Make sure that reviewers get a clear understanding of your technology and its relevance to the project from the information you provide in your response. Secondary information such as videos, slide decks, or letters of support are supplemental pieces of information. If an evaluator needs to consult the secondary material to have a clear understanding of the value of your approach, your response has likely failed to capture their attention.

- **Answer the Actual Question:** The response form allows for the collection of similar information from each respondent, enabling the client to compare responses. When drafting your response, make sure that the information you provide relates to the specific question at hand. By answering the question asked, you provide the client with the information they need to make knowledgeable selections about future engagement.

- **Repetition…Repetition…Repetition:** Avoid repeated information in your response to the extent possible. Repeated information does not give the evaluator persuasive new information to consider. If you must repeat information in your response, do so sparingly and try to rephrase to avoid word-for-word repetition.

- **Scope and Eligibility:** Make sure that you are eligible to participate and that your response is in-scope for the project. If you are unsure about eligibility and/or scope, contact the project administrator to confirm.

- **Focus:** Keep your submission tightly focused. If you propose a combination of several different technologies, you should focus on the unified system and the performance it can achieve. Alternatively, if you have multiple separate and distinct technologies which each address different aspects of the project, don't try to cram them all into a single response. Consider submitting multiple proposals, each focused on a single technology.

- **Uniqueness:** If you submit more than one response, make sure that each one is unique and stands on its own merit. Clearly distinguish each individual proposal by using different titles with noticeably different content. Each submission should encompass a complete and unique proposal, even if it only addresses a portion of the project.

- **Keep It Current:** Present the most recent information in your response. Describing your technology or experience with old information suggests that little-to-no development or change has happened. If your technology is still in development, describe the current state of maturity. If you have an established commercial product, describe who actively uses it and the advantages they receive as a result.

- **Enthusiasm:** You are the best, strongest advocate for your expertise or technology, and your submission should reflect that. Tell the evaluator what makes your approach the best one available.

- **Limitations:** Pay attention to any constraints on the response form. Word/page or format limits may require you to alter what information you share or how you present it; don't be tempted to get around the constraint.

- **Contact Information:** Make sure that you have regular access to any incoming messages, either by phone or email. Use your individual email address and phone number, as opposed to generic or centralized ones. We may try to contact you with questions or updates. Missing deadlines may result in missed opportunities.

If you have questions about responses in general or for a particular project, please reach out to TechConnect by emailing us at challenges@techconnect.org. While we cannot provide specific guidance about what to include in a response, we're more than happy to discuss our projects and process.