



# The M/WBE Strategic Supplier



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## 10 BIG MISTAKES IN GOVERNMENT CONTRACT BIDDING

### Article Summary

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**Introduction** The purpose of this article is to provide you with lessons learned on how effectively bid for federal government contracts. The information below is a summary of the article “10 Big Mistakes in Government Contract Bidding” by Richard D. Lieberman in the January 2007 edition of *Contract Management* magazine. These lessons apply both for IFB (sealed bid) and RFP (negotiated) procurements. Writing effective proposals is one of the key skills a strategic supplier must master. This helps ensure a continued flow of revenue into your business which provides stability and vehicle for long-term growth.

**The Big 10 Bidding Mistakes** Below is a summary of the Top 10 federal contract bidding errors.

Mistakes	Comments	Cure
(1) Not Reading the Entire Solicitation, Including all the Amendments and all of the Clauses Incorporated by Reference	Most people only read the Statement of Work  Need to read other critical sections such as: Inspection & Acceptance, Deliveries or Performance, Special Contract Requirements, and Evaluation Factors for Award	Read the Entire IFB or RFP.  Print out and read the clauses that are incorporated by references.  Acknowledge all amendments (changes) to the solicitation
(2) Not Asking a Question About an Ambiguity in the Solicitation	An ambiguity exists when a phrase, clause or section of the solicitation can have more than one meaning.	Ask the contracting officer for written clarification before the closing date that bids are due. Be sure to confirm receipt.
(3) Not Submitting Your Bid or Offer on Time	Late delivery generally requires rejection of your offer. The only exception might be government mishandling of your bid.	Send your bid in early.  Confirm receipt of your bid / proposal before the due date.
(4) For Negotiated Procurements, Not Considering the Contract May Be Awarded without Discussions	Many offerors think they will be given a second chance to revised their initial proposal. Many less complex procurements do not require discussions.	Submit your best technical and price proposal during your initial submission.  Don't assume anything.
(5) Not Following the Instructions in the Solicitation	Government solicitations frequently state the exact formats for proposals such as page limits, font sizes, etc.  Cost and technical proposals are frequently required to be submitted separately.	Make sure your proposal (offer) follows all the proposal preparation instructions. If not, expect your offer to be downgraded or rejected.
(6) Taking Verbal Advice from Someone Not Authorized to Provide Valid Answers	Verbal advice does not amend or legally bind the government to any RFP changes. Only Contracting Officers are allowed to provide answers.	Make sure all RFP/ IFB advice from the government is in writing and from the contracting officer.

Continued

Mistakes	Comments	Cure
(7) Submitting a Nonconforming Bid or Non complaint Proposal	Any bid not conforming to the essential requirements will be rejected. Typical problems include failing to state or qualify a price; failing to meet product / service specifications, etc.	Make sure you comply with all essential price, quality, and quantity requirements in the solicitation (RFP or IFB)
(8) Not Understanding the Contract Award Evaluation Factors	RFPs normally contain a list of the key evaluation factors and subfactors that will be used to score their proposals.	Spend more time preparing your proposal respond to the most important evaluation factors.
(9) Not Checking Your Proposal for Errors or Omissions	Many big companies have "Red Teams" that prepare the proposal and "Blue Teams" that review it.	Make sure you allow for time to fix proposal errors.
(10) Not Requesting a Debriefing (After the Contract is Awarded)	Offerors can request a debriefing within 3 days after receiving notice of contract award.	Ask for a debriefing. Find out what went wrong and use this information for the next proposal.

**Reviewer Comments** Small, minority- and women-owned businesses can take the following additional steps to help ensure they submit effective proposals that win them new federal government contracts:

- **Compliance Matrix.** Make an (bullet) outline of the RFP / IFB requirements and provide a side-by-side response to each item. This helps ensure you don't miss anything.
- **Supplier Diversity Certifications.** Make sure all your M/WBE certifications are up-to-date.
- **Proposal Boilerplate.** Many RFPs ask for standard items such as past performance history, references, quality plan, key staff resumes, and organization charts. Prepare these ahead of time and keep them ready.
- **Consultants.** It's a good idea to get help while you're learning how to bid on federal government contracts. A qualified consultant can help you do this. Hiring a former contracting officer is a good start.
- **FAR Supplement.** Remember many agencies have supplements to the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR). Be sure to check the agency's FAR supplement in such areas as clauses and special requirements.

Many of the above steps also work with preparing proposals for commercial contracts.

**Summary** Winning federal government contracts is no accident. It takes careful attention to detail. As the USA's largest single buyer with over \$315 billion in annual procurement spend and mandatory supplier diversity goals, there are many opportunities for M/WBE firms with the federal government. I encourage you to take them. Good luck!

**For Assistance** E-MBE.net ([www.e-mbe.net](http://www.e-mbe.net)) offers services to small, minority- and women-owned businesses who need hands-on help on becoming strategic suppliers to major corporations and/or government agencies.

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