



# MASTERING PROCUREMENT IS THE KEY TO BD SUCCESS

BY SUE-ELLA PRODONOVICH

When was the last time you engaged with procurement? If you're like most professionals I know, the answer is probably 'never'. If that's the case, you're missing an almighty trick. As the world of professional services moves to the tender model it's increasingly procurement that has the power.

If your practice is to become a master of modern business development you also need to master procurement. And that means understanding them - the way they think, how to negotiate their process and, most importantly, how to give them what they need so that you make the cut and get onto that all-important supplier list.

## First Of All, Remember: Procurement Are Humans Too

Bizarrely, in my opinion, many professionals see procurement as off-limits. They think- that by getting in touch with them and asking them questions they'll be stone-walled, shut down or even excluded from the chance to participate in future tenders.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

The reality is procurement are people too. (There I said it.) They have hopes and fears - well, two of them anyway. They want to be sure:

- That the supplier they recommend can do the job they're hired to do
- That they can do it on time and within budget, and
- That the supplier's business is sustainable

Really, that's it. These are the three things they're really interested in. The problem is that many potential suppliers simply can't fulfil these criteria and give them the peace of mind they're so desperately craving.

If you want to be able to do it, here's how.

## Get On The Front Foot

Interestingly, most professionals are mega-assertive, taking the lead on everything in they do in life. At least that is, until it's time to sell themselves. Then they suddenly go from lions to door mice: unwilling to put themselves forward because they're worried about coming across as pushy. But the reality is if you don't ask you don't (or at least rarely) get - especially in the world of tendering.

So the first thing you have to do is be proactive and pick up the phone.

Simply call the organisations you want to supply to and ask when their next request-for-proposal (RFP) will be issued. Then ask to be invited to pitch. Put the date in the diary and be prepared to follow up closer to the date if you have to so that you get on at least the preliminary list. The squeaky wheel gets the oil.



## Ask Questions

When the Expression of Interest (EOI) or Request for Proposal (RFP) does come your way it's not the end of your relationship with procurement. In fact, it really is just the beginning.

Once that file's in your inbox or that document's on your desk, it's time to begin a whole new round of question asking - or as they say in advertising, it's time to interrogate the brief.

Analyse the request thoroughly and, if you don't understand what they're looking for in a question - or the reason it has been included - speak to procurement to find out why. Not only will this show you're taking the tender seriously, but it will also give you a (fair) advantage when it comes to answering each of the questions in the best possible way.

## Answer Everything

One of the easiest ways to make procurement's life easier is to answer every single question they give you. I know it can seem a bit pointless to answer questions such as "How many people on site wear hardhats" when it has no relevance to an accounting or law firm.

However, if you're leaving answers blank or writing "N/A" you become non-compliant and there's a reason to eliminate you right there.

By just answering the questions and writing something like "All firewardens have access to hardhats" you'll put yourself in their good books and give yourself a better chance than many applicants.

And, if you really don't know how to answer something, again use it as an excuse to get in touch. (See above).

## Emphasise Your Process

Let's face it, there's not a lot separating many professional services firms. They tend to have similar specialisations, similar experience, similar clients, similar talent, similar price tags and similar USPs. At least that's how procurement will see it.

My belief is that in a competitive tender like this, where the horses look the same, feel the same and are ridden by similar jockeys, it can be process that wins (or loses) the day.

Use this to your advantage.

Take the time on your response to show that you have tried, true and transparent processes in place. Spell out the benefits of these in your response and what they mean for the potential client.

This can mark you out as a safer pair of hands - you'll be helping allay any fears procurement may have about your ability to deliver. This can be an especially important thing for small-to-mid-sized firms.

## Bring Some Ideas Of Your Own

Finally, if you really want to impress procurement why not go one further and offer some suggestions of your own on the way things could be done more cheaply, efficiently or to a higher standard?

If you think this is a bit forward, think again. Many in procurement will see this as a sign that you're trying to understand them more deeply and thinking about how to make their lives even better.



Just be careful though - don't do this without advance warning. Speak to procurement about what you plan to do. Also don't do it to the exclusion of the steps outlined above. As I've already mentioned many times, you need to be able to fill out the template and give procurement exactly what they want.

It's just that by taking this approach you may be able to go one better and give procurement what they need.

## Want More?

If you'd like to know more about how to master procurement, email [Sue-Ella](#) or [get in touch](#).



**Sue-Ella Prodonovich**  
*Principal, Prodonovich Advisory*  
[sueella@prodonovich.com](mailto:sueella@prodonovich.com)  
(02) 9241 5575

© 2019 Prodonovich Advisory. Please respect our copyright and the effort taken to produce the original material in this document. This document or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the author. If you'd like to share this article, please don't forget to acknowledge the author.