

Are Consultants the Answer? (Part 3): How to find the right consultant

*By Chris Simmons, Founder and Principal,
Rainmakerz Consulting LLC*

In Part 2 of this series we discussed some of the reasons why companies don't hire consultants—even when they need them. Part 3 describes some strategies and tips for how (and where) to find the right consultant once you've decided to look.

**Take the time to think
about—and write
down—a description of
the consulting services,
capabilities, and
experience you need**

The decision to hire a proposal development consultant is relatively easy compared to the more challenging task – how to find and hire the right one. It should come as no surprise that consultants work out best for companies that have clearly defined project roles, responsibilities, and capability requirements.

Start with a job description

Take the time to think about—and write down—a description of the consulting services, capabilities, and experience you need to complete your proposal. I use a simple one-page opportunity description that includes the following topics at a minimum:

- Position title (role and list of responsibilities)
- Qualifications and experience (number of years, specific methodologies, agency experience)
- Work location (customer site, home office, or both?)
- Period of performance (start and end dates)
- Relevant prospective customer and RFP information
- Relevant proposal team information
- Equipment requirements (does the consultant need a laptop?)
- Target weekly hours and total budget (50 per week is usually a good target)

Narrow down the field

In the Washington, DC, area alone there are literally hundreds of proposal development consulting companies and individual consultants. On the surface, Internet inquiries seem like a reasonable starting point, but this approach can be surprisingly ineffective and inefficient.



Consider these whopping results on a recent Internet search of “proposal development consultants in Washington, DC”—

- Google (187,000 results)
- Bing (839,000 results)
- Yahoo! (1,990,000 results)

Despite the power of these search engines, many of the first few electronic pages are filled with jobs posted by competitors looking for the same consultants you currently seek. Although some proposal development consulting companies and individuals are listed, many of these have either bought their way to the front pages or have used tech savvy tricks to achieve higher listings. Resist the search engine urge and consider taking a more focused and personalized approach.

Talk to friends and colleagues

A more effective approach is to start by talking to friends and colleagues who have had experience in hiring proposal development consultants. Since most companies use proposal development consultants at one time or another, it should be very easy to find a number of informed opinions from trusted sources on this topic.

Leverage your local APMP chapter

The Association of Proposal Management Professionals (APMP) is the de facto networking group for proposal development consultants. APMP has more than 3,500 members worldwide and almost 1,000 members in greater Washington, D.C., alone. The local National Capital Area chapter website (www.apmpnca.org) lists 23 corporate partner companies. More than half of these companies specialize in proposal development consulting and have highly informed opinions on the pros and cons of local and national firms that can help. (Think free consulting) Pick a few companies that catch your eye and ask some basic questions about the market, consultant availability, and the reputations and value propositions of competitors.

Tap into the social network

APMP and some local association chapters have a number of discussion groups on LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com) and other social networking sites like The Federal Contractor Network (www.tfcn.us). Join a discussion group and ask for recommended companies or consultants. Here are a few discussion groups for these two networks to consider:



- **LinkedIn:** (APMP; APMP NCA Chapter; Proposal Writers Group; The RFP Database; Bid and Proposal Management Professionals; CapturePlanning.com; Consultants Network; Global Proposal Management Professionals)
- **The Federal Contractor Network:** (The Job Spot; Program/Project Management; Contract Proposal Professionals; APMP Members Circle; Subject Matter Expert Directory)

Once you have defined the services and capabilities you need and have narrowed down the field to a manageable number of options you're ready to find the right consultant. The final part of this series will focus on what makes a good consultant the right one for you.

Chris Simmons is the founder and principal member of Rainmakerz consulting—a business development solutions company specializing in all aspects of proposal development. He is also the Vice President of the local APMP chapter in the greater Washington, DC area.



Still confused or looking for more detailed suggestions? Take time now to send feedback, comments, or questions about this or other challenging proposal issues to Chris at chris@rainmakerz.biz or 202-255-2355. Visit www.rainmakerz.biz.