



RFP Quality Checklist

This checklist is organized into three parts. Part A is for organizations that issue RFPs — use it before you publish to ensure your solicitation attracts strong, comparable proposals. Part B is for organizations that respond to RFPs — use it as a final quality gate before you hit submit. Part C is the differentiator: five crossover questions written from both perspectives, showing how dual-expertise insight produces better outcomes on either side of the table.

Print it. Pin it to your wall. Run every RFP through it.

COURTESY OF WRITING FOR RESULTS

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PART A – ISSUERS OF RFPs

- 1. **Clear Project Summary.** Does the opening section give vendors a plain-language overview of the project's purpose, expected outcomes, and organizational context — in two paragraphs or fewer? Vendors who cannot understand what you need in the first 60 seconds will move on to other opportunities.
- 2. **Defined Scope of Work (SOW).** Does the SOW specify deliverables, performance standards, and acceptance criteria — while leaving room for vendors to propose innovative approaches? Overly prescriptive SOWs eliminate the creative solutions you are paying for?
- 3. **Realistic Timeline.** Does the RFP allow sufficient time for vendors to ask questions, prepare thoughtful proposals, and assemble required documentation? Best practice is a minimum of 30 calendar days for standard procurements. Setting an internal completion date 5–7 days before submission deadline creates buffer for executive review and technical upload issues.
- 4. **Stated Budget Range or Ceiling.** Have you disclosed a budget range, a not-to-exceed amount, or at minimum the factors that will inform budget evaluation? Withholding budget information produces wildly inconsistent pricing that cannot be fairly compared.
- 5. **Transparent Evaluation Criteria.** Are the evaluation criteria and their relative weights published in the RFP? Buyers should assign weights and scales to measure proposal quality beyond basic requirements — and communicate those weights so vendors can tailor responses accordingly.
- 6. **Consistent Submission Format.** Does the RFP specify page limits, required sections, file formats, font sizes, and naming conventions? Standardized formatting enables apples-to-apples comparison and prevents strong proposals from being disqualified on technicalities.
- 7. **Question-and-Answer Process.** Have you included a formal Q&A window with a named point of contact, submission method, and deadline — plus a commitment to share anonymized Q&A responses with all vendors? This levels the playing field and improves overall proposal quality.
- 8. **Evaluation Committee Defined.** Have you identified who will evaluate proposals (by role, if not by name) and confirmed they have no conflicts of interest? Vendors submit stronger proposals when they know whether evaluators are technical, financial, or executive decision-makers.

- 9. **Mandatory Versus Desirable Requirements.** Are requirements clearly labeled as mandatory (pass/fail) versus desirable (scored)? Ambiguity here causes qualified vendors to self-select out — or unqualified vendors to assume they qualify.
- 10. **Compliance with Procurement Thresholds.** If the project involves federal funds, does the RFP align with current procurement thresholds? As of October 1, 2025, key FAR thresholds increased: the micro-purchase threshold rose from \$10,000 to \$15,000, the simplified acquisition threshold from \$250,000 to \$350,000. For grants, the revised 2 CFR 200 Uniform Guidance (effective October 1, 2024) raised the single audit threshold from \$750,000 to \$1,000,000 and the de minimis indirect cost rate from 10% to 15%.
- 11. **Vendor Accessibility.** Is the RFP written in clear, jargon-free language accessible to qualified vendors of varying sizes — including small businesses and nonprofits that may lack dedicated proposal teams? Research consistently finds that overly complex application processes discourage smaller organizations, those serving disadvantaged communities, and those in rural areas from competing.
- 12. **References and Support Resources.** Does the RFP include named contacts, Q&A procedures, and reference links so vendors know where to turn for clarification rather than guessing and submitting weaker proposals?
- 13. **Proportionality Check.** Is the level of documentation, reporting, and compliance effort proportionate to the contract value? Burdensome RFPs drive away the specialist firms that nonprofits and smaller agencies need most — the organizations with deep expertise but limited administrative capacity. If you are requiring 50 pages of documentation for a \$75,000 contract, recalibrate.
- 14. **Terms and Conditions Reasonableness.** Are contract terms, insurance requirements, indemnification clauses, and IP provisions reasonable for the scope and value of the project? Unreasonable terms are the silent killer of competitive fields — experienced vendors simply decline to bid.
- 15. **Innovation Encouragement.** Does the RFP explicitly invite alternative approaches or value-added suggestions? A single line — "Vendors are encouraged to propose alternative approaches they believe would better achieve the stated outcomes" — can dramatically improve the quality of proposals received.

PART B – RESPONDERS TO RFPs

Use this section as your final quality gate before submission. Every item maps to a common reason proposals are scored down or eliminated.

- 1. **Compliance Verification.** Have you built a compliance traceability matrix mapping every RFP requirement to its exact location in your proposal? A compliance matrix maps solicitation requirements to proposal sections, ensuring all requirements are addressed and evaluators know where to find each response. No requirement should map to "not addressed" — if a requirement does not apply, explicitly state that rather than leaving it blank.
- 2. **Executive Summary Strength.** Does your executive summary lead with the client's problem (not your company history), state your proposed solution in one sentence, and preview your three strongest differentiators? This is the only section every evaluator reads in full.
- 3. **Requirements Mirror.** Have you mirrored the RFP's language, section structure, and numbering in your response? Evaluators working through dozens of proposals reward responses that are easy to navigate. Mirror the RFP language in your headings and avoid generic marketing copy — evaluators want direct answers.
- 4. **Win Themes Present.** Are your key value propositions and differentiators clear, customer-focused, and woven throughout — not buried in an appendix? The Red Team review process specifically checks whether win themes are compelling and whether the customer's language is being used.
- 5. **Evaluation Criteria Alignment.** Have you scored your own proposal against the published evaluation criteria before submission? If the RFP weights technical capability at 40%, price at 30%, and past performance at 30%, does your page allocation reflect those weights?
- 6. **Pricing Strategy.** Does your pricing section demonstrate total value and long-term cost savings — not just line-item costs? Structure pricing to highlight value rather than just listing upfront expenses. Include assumptions and exclusions to prevent scope disputes during contract negotiation.
- 7. **Past Performance Evidence.** Have you included 2–3 relevant past performance examples with measurable outcomes (percentages, dollar amounts, timelines) rather than generic claims? Buyers award higher points to concrete evidence of past success than to standardized benefit statements.

- 8. **Implementation Plan Detail.** Does your implementation section include a phase-by-phase breakdown with specific deliverables, named team members and roles, risk identification with mitigation strategies, communication plans, and measurable success metrics?
- 9. **Team Qualifications.** Have you included brief bios or qualification summaries for key personnel — showing relevant certifications, years of domain experience, and similar project history? Name the people who will actually do the work, not just firm principals.
- 10. **Assumptions and Exceptions.** Have you clearly stated all assumptions underlying your proposal and explicitly noted any RFP requirements you cannot meet or propose to meet differently? Hidden exceptions discovered during contract negotiation destroy trust and often kill the deal.
- 11. **Red Team Review Completed.** Has your proposal been reviewed by someone who did not write it — ideally using the Five C's framework: Coherence, Completeness, Compliance, Consistency, and Correctness? A proper Red Team simulates how the buyer's evaluator would score your proposal, checking clarity, competitiveness, and compliance from the customer's perspective.
- 12. **Visual Readability.** Does your proposal use clear headings, bullet points, tables, and white space to make it scannable on tight evaluation timelines? Avoid dense blocks of text — evaluators reviewing 20+ proposals reward documents that respect their time.
- 13. **Formatting Compliance.** Have you verified page limits, required sections, font sizes, file formats, and naming conventions? Strong proposals are routinely disqualified on technicalities. Set your internal completion date 5–7 days before the submission deadline to leave buffer for executive review and upload issues.
- 14. **Client-Specific Customization.** Have you demonstrated knowledge of the buyer's specific challenges, industry pressures, existing systems, and stated objectives? Generic responses that could apply to any buyer score significantly lower than customized ones that reference the buyer's actual situation.
- 15. **Final Proofread and Consistency Check.** Have you checked for numerical consistency (do the pricing tables match the narrative?), grammatical accuracy, correct client name usage throughout, and consistent terminology? One wrong client name can eliminate an otherwise winning proposal.

PART C – CROSSOVER QUESTIONS

These five questions are the "Both Sides Advantage" differentiator. Each one is written from both the issuer and the responder perspective — because understanding what the other side needs is the single fastest way to improve your own document.

16/1. Scope Clarity — Both Perspectives.

- ***If you are the issuer:*** Could a qualified vendor read your SOW and produce an accurate estimate without guessing? If your scope requires a phone call to understand, it will produce proposals that cannot be compared.
- ***If you are the responder:*** Have you restated the scope in your own words to prove you understand it — and flagged any ambiguities with proposed assumptions? This demonstrates mastery rather than passive compliance.

17/2. Evaluation Transparency — Both Perspectives.

- ***If you are the issuer:*** Would your evaluation criteria survive a challenge from an unsuccessful vendor? If a losing bidder filed a protest, could you demonstrate that every proposal was scored consistently against published criteria?
- ***If you are the responder:*** Have you built your compliance matrix to show evaluators exactly where each criterion is addressed — including page numbers and section references? Make it impossible for an evaluator to miss your strongest content.

18/3. Timeline Feasibility — Both Perspectives.

- ***If you are the issuer:*** Does your timeline account for the vendor's reality — mobilization, staffing, procurement of materials — or only your internal deadlines? Unrealistic timelines attract only vendors desperate enough to agree to anything.
- ***If you are the responder:*** Have you proposed a realistic timeline with milestones, or simply echoed the RFP's dates? If the timeline is unrealistic, say so professionally and propose an alternative — this demonstrates expertise, not insubordination.

19/4. Risk Acknowledgment — Both Perspectives.

- ***If you are the issuer:*** Have you acknowledged known risks in the RFP (regulatory changes, supply chain constraints, technology dependencies) rather than pretending the project is risk-free? Vendors respect — and respond better to — honest scoping.
- ***If you are the responder:*** Have you proactively identified risks the RFP does not mention and proposed mitigation strategies? This is where experienced

vendors separate themselves from the field. Include risk identification with specific mitigation strategies rather than generic assurances.

20/5. Post-Award Communication — Both Perspectives.

- **If you are the issuer:** Does your RFP describe what happens after award — kickoff meeting expectations, reporting cadence, escalation procedures, and contract modification process?
- **If you are the responder:** Have you included a post-award communication and transition plan that shows the client you have already thought past the proposal stage? The strongest proposals answer the question the evaluator is silently asking: "What happens on Day 1 after we sign?"

REGULATORY QUICK REFERENCE

The following thresholds and rules are current as of March 2026 and are referenced throughout this checklist.

Regulation	Key Change	Effective Date
FAR Micro-Purchase Threshold	\$10,000 → \$15,000 <small>acquisition</small>	October 1, 2025
FAR Simplified Acquisition Threshold	\$250,000 → \$350,000 <small>acquisition</small>	October 1, 2025
2 CFR 200 Single Audit Threshold	\$750,000 → \$1,000,000 <small>epa</small>	Fiscal years beginning on/after Oct 1, 2024
2 CFR 200 De Minimis Indirect Cost Rate	10% → 15% <small>epa +1</small>	Awards issued on/after Oct 1, 2024
2 CFR 200 Equipment Capitalization Threshold	\$5,000 → \$10,000 <small>bakertilly</small>	Awards issued on/after Oct 1, 2024
FAR 2.0 (Revolutionary FAR Overhaul)	Comprehensive plain-language rewrite in progress; Parts 1, 10, 34, and 52 updated as of June 2025 <small>thinkbrg</small>	Rolling — EO 14275 target was Oct 13, 2025 <small>wiley</small>

ABOUT THIS CHECKLIST

This checklist was created by **Writing for Results**, a professional writing consultancy that works both sides of the RFP table — helping issuers write solicitations that attract better bids, and helping responders write proposals that win contracts.

The "Both Sides Advantage" is not marketing language. It is the operating reality of a team that understands what evaluators look for because we have been the evaluators — and what vendors struggle with because we have been the vendors.

Ready to put dual-expertise to work on your next RFP?

- [Request a Free Consultation](#)
- [RFP Writing Services \(For Issuers\)](#)
- [Proposal Writing Services \(For Responders\)](#)

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