

## **Cut Through the Fluff to See What Proposals Mean**

*Dining Insights, Winter 2010*

*Third in a series of articles about the selection of a food service contractor.*

**F**ood service contractors seem to believe that proposals are evaluated by weight: the heaviest one wins. The proposals you receive, even from regional and local companies, are likely to run to 100 pages or more, professionally produced and filled with colorful pictures.

They're also filled with extraneous words wrapped around nuggets of information and hard facts. But if your RFP required proposers to follow a specific format, it's possible to find the nuggets amidst the fluff. The best way to compare offers on each topic is side-by-side on a spreadsheet. You'll quickly see who has the best proposal on each element of the dining service.

### **Put Financials Aside**

Do the same for financial offers, but put these aside. It's more important to first determine which company's proposal most closely fits your requirements. The financial arrangements can be worked out later.

If you don't have a formal selection committee, it's worthwhile to have key stakeholders – those who oversee or are served by the dining service – participate in the evaluation. You will have valuable perspectives to consider and a fuller “buy-in” when the final decision is made.

You are likely to find that at least one company missed the mark – didn't understand your objectives or submitted an incomplete or incompetent proposal.

Be sure to ask questions about anything that is unclear. Do it by e-mail so you'll have a written record of the questions and responses.

If your proposal contains legal language and contractual requirements, the larger companies will include a list of their objections to terms. Read these carefully. One or more may be a deal-breaker.

### **Picking the Finalists**

You will find two, or possibly three, proposals are closest to your standards and objectives and have made reasonable financial offers. These are your finalists.

You may find one seems to be the best offer, but keep at least one other company in the running. The best offer on paper may not really be your best choice. If each company knows it has a competitor, it is likely to be more amenable in negotiations.

*The next article in this series will discuss negotiations with the finalists and selection of the winner.*

*Clarion can help you with RFP development, the selection process and reaching a fair agreement with the best-qualified company. For information, contact Tom Mac Dermott, 603/ 642-8011 or Angela Phelan, 973/544-6223, or e-mail us at [info@clariongp.com](mailto:info@clariongp.com).*