

Murphy's Laws for Proposal Development

1. A schedule isn't. And even if it was, it's already obsolete.
2. The RFP is not optional.
3. The quality of a proposal will be in inverse proportion to the number of people who work on it.
4. Change cycles will expand to fill a longer schedule.
5. The last change cycle is always rushed at the expense of quality.
6. If your equipment works flawlessly, your staff will take unexpected leave. And vice versa.
7. No database will ever contain the information you need and if it does it will be out of date.
8. All resumes are incomplete.
9. The cost per page of a fixed page proposal and a unlimited length proposal will be the same.
10. You will produce more paper responding to an oral proposal than a paper-based submission.
11. The RFP is always wired to someone else.
12. The incumbent always has the upper hand. Unless you're the incumbent.
13. The past performance review of a client that loves you will be responded to by someone who doesn't know you.
14. The RFP always leaves out the evaluation criteria for internal politics.
15. An RFP will either have sufficient detail to contradict itself, or so little detail that it will be ambiguous.
16. If you are successful at influencing a draft RFP, it will result in your unique solution being made the requirement for everyone to respond to.
17. If your solution is truly unique, there will be multiple awards.
18. A must-win won't. And if it does it won't be profitable.
19. Why do must-wins still have a win rate?
20. The budget for a must-win is more. The budget for a normal bid is more.
21. Any easy to understand solution will be wrong.
22. Any sophisticated solution will be incorrectly scored during evaluation.
23. Any profitable win will have staffing problems.
24. Throwing people at a late proposal makes it later.
25. The greater the time required for final production, the more changes will come out of the final review.
26. A final review isn't.
27. All reviews require a review to verify the changes, creating a self-perpetuating spiral that consumes all resources in sight and making final submission impossible.
28. There's no such thing as an original theme.
29. A team of monkey's typing randomly on keyboards might take longer to produce an identical proposal, but the B&P expense would be lower.
30. Proposals are more about not losing than they are about no winning.
31. A successful proposal capability will be downsized.
32. The minute you start a project is the minute you start to lose the recompute.
33. The amount of client awareness and market intelligence available is inversely proportional to the value of the submission.
34. Under a rigorously controlled proposal process, the executive-in-charge will do whatever he/she/it damn well pleases.
35. The only thing worse than not having a solution in your proposal, is what you have to go through to get a solution into your proposal.
36. The cross-reference matrix won't.
37. The ability to do something and the ability to communicate about it are mutually exclusive.
38. The one thing that is universally true about proposal lessons learned is that people never learn their lessons.

39. All proposals end.
40. An extension merely prolongs the agony.
41. It's too late to no bid.
42. Those with skills are indispensable and therefore never available for proposal work.
43. For every well-written proposal section, there is an equal and opposite criticism.
44. Trivial matters will be handled immediately; important matters will not be solved until the last minute.
45. Anytime things appear to be going better, you have overlooked something.
46. If you explain so clearly that nobody can misunderstand, someone will.
47. If you do something which you are sure will meet with everyone's approval, someone won't like it.
48. No matter how long or how many times you explain, no one is listening.
49. The proposal team will occasionally stumble over the winning approach, but most of the time they will pick themselves up and continue as though nothing has happened.
50. Clearly stated instructions will consistently produce multiple interpretations.
51. Work will inevitably flow to competent writers until they burnout.
52. Whenever a proposal process becomes completely defined, some damn fool changes something which either abolishes the process or expands it beyond recognition.
53. The key decision makers for a proposal's budget will not participate in its production.
54. If you are confident about a recently submitted proposal, it's because you don't know better.
55. The first 90% of a proposal takes 90% of the effort. The final 10% of the proposal takes the other 90%.
56. Any proposal that begins well, ends badly. Any proposal that begins badly, ends worse.
57. Proposals are worked on by two different types of people. Those who understand what they do not manage, and those who manage what they do not understand.
58. No matter what stage of completion the proposal is at, the cost of the remainder of the proposal stays constant.
59. The staff who are depending upon winning the proposal to continue their jobs, all have contingency hire agreements.
60. It is a mistake to allow any mechanical object to realize that you are in a hurry.
61. Knowing Murphy's law won't help either.
62. After things have gone from bad to worse, the cycle will repeat itself.
63. Important things that are supposed to happen do not happen, especially when the proposal manager is on the lookout.
64. A successful proposal cannot be replicated.
65. The information you have is not what you want.
66. The information you want is not what you need.
67. The information you need is not what you can obtain.
68. The information you can obtain costs more than you want to pay.
69. A carelessly planned proposal takes three times the B&P expected; a carefully planned proposal takes only twice as much.
70. The effort required to fix a proposal increases geometrically with time.
71. Never say "oops" during final production.
72. People are always available for work in the past tense.

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