



Learn to Say “No”! Qualify Opportunities Early

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ABOUT DYNANET

Dynanet Corporation has a long history of successfully assisting federal and state governments in accomplishment of their missions. The proof of our success is in the numerous accommodations and awards we have been given and the list of partners who choose Dynanet as a business team member. A highly experienced and senior leadership team with both private sector and federal experience leads our talented and certified professionals.

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A typical Business Development (BD) methodology for large business is based on a Capability Maturity Model (CMM) specifically developed for the practice. Yes, there is a CMM for BD! Adopted by large businesses it is process driven, extremely disciplined, keeps the pipeline in constant view, consists of a phased based lifecycle, provides critical decision points for continued pursuit and most importantly, qualifies the opportunity early. This disciplined practice results in high win percentages. A large business' BD methodology is truly a by-product of its greatest strength: It's stability and depth of resources.

In the small business community, many practice a BD methodology that, also, is a by-product of their greatest strength: Agility. It is not based on a CMM-BD process, but on an ancient phrase, “BONSOP”. The word is composed of two separate words, “BON” which is the strategic portion of the practice and “SOP”, which represents the tactical. It is a shorten form of the phrase, “Back Of a Napkin, Seat Of your Pants”. Unfortunately, as a small business, our greatest strength becomes our greatest weakness.

The day will come when small business graduates to large business status. Gone will be the days of set-aside acquisitions. We will be competing with the “Big Dogs”, fighting for work as a prime, without the deep pockets to invest in bid and proposal (B&P) activity. We no longer bring socio-economic targets as subcontractors. Gone will be the days of being courted by large business in the hunt to satisfy their small business goals. As a small business, we need to institute the same disciplines as large business in our daily business development activity. We must ensure that we are carefully selecting our pursuit opportunities and not spending precious B&P dollars pursuing low win percentage deals. We must focus on healthy prime contract work that will sustain the company through awkward adolescent years called “Mid-Tier”.

At Dynanet, we've developed a BD framework based on the same methodologies employed by large business, but tailored to better support the small business. A colleague, Jack Dunham, and I presented this framework on a GovWin webinar and I presented the same in a session at Deltek's Insight 2013 conference in Dallas, TX. The framework is based on six major phases of the capture cycle, and provides the ability for small business to quickly qualify opportunities. It encourages the

discipline to walk away from an opportunity if it doesn't present a high probability of win. The six phases and their respective objectives are as follows:

1. Analysis - Identify opportunities early in their lifecycle worthy of further tracking for future pursuit consideration.
2. Pursuit - Collect the data needed to decide whether to invest the resources and effort to pursue a prospective opportunity.
3. Capture - Further qualify the opportunity through the development of a detailed capture plan, target solution and supporting financial data.
4. Proposal - Produce a compliant, compelling and winning proposal.
5. Post Proposal - Respond to inquiries and government requests.
6. Post Award - Capture proposal outcomes, lessons learned, and archive proposal artifacts for continuous improvement of the Opportunity Lifecycle process.

Each phase has its unique set of activities, key decision factors, roles and responsibilities, artifacts, tools, templates and checklists. However, our goal for this article is to quickly qualify the opportunity by answering four basic questions which are encapsulated in the Analysis phase: 1) is the opportunity real, 2) is it within our core competency, 3) do we have customer intimacy, and 4) can we win.

There is a tremendous amount of activity that goes into answering those four questions, and much of it is Dynanet intellectual property. However, for the purposes of this article, we will provide an overview of the Analysis phase of the cycle.

Is the opportunity real? It is here that we gain an understanding of the customer and their commitment to the acquisition. To simplify the process, we gather information such as: Who is the customer? Is it program funded? Who within the customer's organization is sponsoring the acquisition? Is this a re-compete of current work? Is this organic grown with a current task order? Is this new business? We then analyze and evaluate the scope, and draft Statement of Work (SOW) and make sure we fully understand the customer's stated goals and objectives for the solicitation.

Is the opportunity within our core competency? Dynanet looks at our position as a service provider and suppresses the tendency to over estimate our ability to win the deal. Note: I did not say over estimate our ability to perform the work. This is where the small business struggles the most, the "BON" says we can do the work so we immediately move into "SOP'ing" out a proposal only to lose the deal in the end.

In contrast, Dynanet assesses key indicators before we declare “Pursuit”. Establishing a probability of win focuses our team on Dynanet’s core competencies, past performance as a prime and customer intimacy. Core competency may be strong in a particular technical discipline, but may not result in a past performance as a prime contractor. Dynanet has walked away from opportunities simply because we could not show corporate experience as the prime contractor on the engagement.

Do we have customer intimacy? I cannot express enough the value of having a well-established and healthy working relationship with the customer. If this is new business and Dynanet is not the incumbent, it is important to understand the relationship the current incumbent has with the customer. Incumbent performance should be the very first part of your competitive analysis that is also found in subsequent phases of the framework. Dynanet may not be the incumbent on the specific acquisition but may be active in other programs within the agency and has that customer intimacy. If you are not on site with a customer, there are still ways to add customer knowledge through partnerships and strategic hires. For Dynanet, this part of the process is critical before our executive team will discuss opportunity pursuit.

Can we win? All these indicators provide enough fodder to answer that question! If we lack in any of these areas, we can qualify this as a “no” for Dynanet. If we are positive that we have the ability, past performance and intimacy with the customer, the opportunity stays in our pipeline and we move to the next phase, PURSUIT. Every company should tailor the BD process to meet the size and needs of their organization and customer. What remains, however, are these key steps to determine ultimate pursuit.

As a final thought, note that the Post Award phase of the cycle presents the opportunity to conduct a lessons learned activity. It is here that the capture team, along with the executive team honestly analyzes the proposal effort, identifying areas that were done well and areas that need improvement. Cyclic in nature, this framework hones the capture qualities of the company.

The next article in this series will focus on the technology side of our BD process. So stay tuned as I, along with my colleagues, share our thoughts, successes and lesson’s learn as we journey together, navigating uncertain waters and achieving success in great pursuits.