

THE ART OF THE RFP



You can't build a house without a foundation. And in the association meeting planning world, you can't get a good hotel conference contract without a well-thought-out request for proposal (RFP) process. Then, once you have a promising proposal in hand, you need to negotiate the nitty-gritty so you walk away with a contract that will help you cost-effectively deliver the best event possible.

The Well-Crafted RFP

You can quickly throw together an electronic RFP, but when the proposals you receive don't include what you need to plan your best conference, that time saved means nothing. Before submitting the RFP, consider precisely what you need to make this event a success. And send your RFP only to hotels you think can meet your needs. A low bid from a hotel that can't deliver what you need isn't ultimately helpful. Here are some important items to share in the RFP to ensure you get the best bids.

- **Your budget.** Providing a ballpark of your room rate, room rental, and food and/or beverage budget ensures that the right hotels bid on your event. Don't worry: There's still room for negotiation at the end, but this framework will be helpful for both sides.
- **Past event data.** If this is an annual event, then you have data from previous years on picked-up rooms, A/V, catering, and more. Sharing that information can only benefit you.
- **Meeting objectives.** Include what you want attendees to walk away having accomplished at your conference. This way, the proposals might offer some ideas to help you achieve your end goal.
- **The essentials.** Share your top-level wants and needs so that every proposal includes them. That way you are comparing apples to apples.

Your Best Contracts

Once you've chosen your best proposal, it's time to negotiate the hotel contract. Remember: Negotiation is a two-way street, and your hotel partner likely only has so much give to go with the take. Consider these tips for getting your must-haves along with some nice-to-have concessions.

- **Read every word.** And then read it again. Just as important as knowing precisely what's in the contract is knowing what's not and should be.
- **Ask questions.** If a clause, addendum, or any piece of legalese is unclear to you, ask your hotel representative about it. With contracts, ignorance is never bliss.
- **Manage expectations.** Be transparent about any must-haves not already in the proposal. There's no sense being unclear about something that will kill the deal if you can't get it.
- **Don't go concession crazy.** Hotels want your business and will work with you to get it, but there's only so much they can do when it comes to complimentary rooms, suite upgrades, allowable attrition, and the like. Don't ask for a million concessions. Prioritize the ones that would really enhance your meeting or help your budget.



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