2026

Proposal Win Rate Report

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Executive Summary: How Teams Win

Businesses of all size attribute weak RFP performance to execution failures. Slow drafting, pricing, or insufficient SME engagement among many other reasons. **But, why do teams win?**

AutoRFP.ai & Stargazy surveyed 97 bid professionals across sectors, team sizes, and maturity levels to understand what separates high performers. Of this group, 90 respondents provided verified win-rate data used for the cohort analysis.

The findings challenge nearly every assumption organizations hold about why they win or lose RFPs.

The structural design of your RFP engine, including capacity, customer research, SME involvement, and governance, explains win rates better than any tactical behaviour. Content quality without strategic customer insight produces little performance lift.

What does predict success is whether your operating model makes strong execution possible in the first place.

Most teams lose RFPs because their system is perfectly designed to produce the results they currently achieve.

Who You Sell To

37%
Sell mostly to
Public Sector

40%
Sell mixed between
Public and Private Sector

23%
Sell mostly
to Private Sector

The Win Rate Cohorts

We segmented respondents into three groups based on their reported win rates over the past year: Low Win (0–25 percent), Medium Win (26–50 percent), and High Win (51–76 percent and above). Our analysis compares the High Win and Low Win cohorts to isolate the factors that most influence performance.

At a demographic level, the groups appear similar. Roughly three-quarters of all respondents work in organizations with fewer than 300 employees, and the distribution of public versus private sector bidding is broadly consistent across cohorts. The meaningful differences emerge in how their proposal engines operate, specifically, how central proposals are to revenue, how governance is structured, and what each group considers essential to winning.

THE HIGH WIN COHORT:
- Convert a larger share of opportunities, with a median shortlist rate of 63 percent (vs. 38 percent for Low Win teams).
- Operate in bid-dependent businesses, where 51–75 percent of revenue typically comes from competitive bids.
- Maintain clear ownership: every High Win team has at least one dedicated bid manager.

THE LOW WIN COHORT:
- Shortlist rates concentrate in the 26–50 percent range, with many teams remaining at 25 percent or below.
- More likely to manage bids as a shared responsibility across sales, marketing, or operations, rather than through a defined proposal function.
- 14 percent report no dedicated bid role, indicating a structural weakness aligned with lower performance.
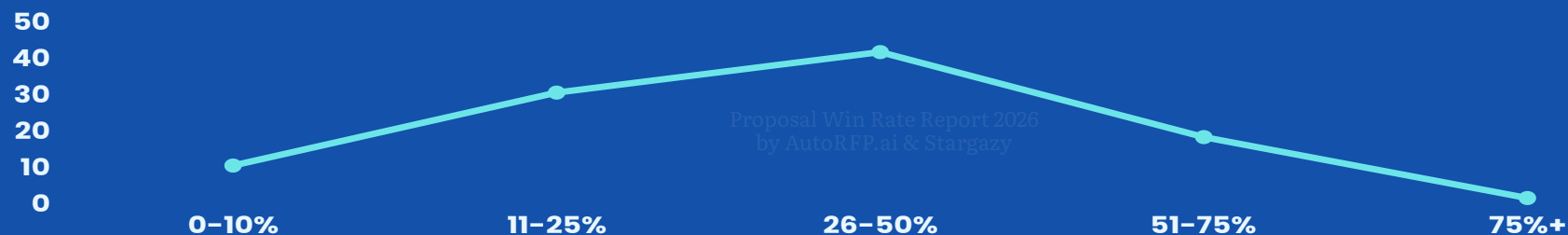
Win-rate question: "What's your approximate proposal win rate over the past 12 months? n=90 (respondents who answered)

The Traps That Define Low Performance

Each driver below represents a comforting belief that the data contradicts. These are not edge cases.

"Relationships win bids." Relationships help, but far less than leaders assume. Across all sectors, presumed relationship strength shows no meaningful correlation with higher win rates. High-performing teams succeed across both public and private sectors because their operating model, not their familiarity, creates advantage. Relationships supplement strong process; they cannot compensate for its absence.

"Proposals don't drive real revenue." The data shows the opposite. Revenue dependence on competitive bids is the strongest predictor of win rates in the entire dataset. High-performing teams typically derive 51–75 percent of company revenue from bids. Low performers cluster at ≤25 percent. When bids matter commercially, organizations build the structures that make higher win rates possible.

"Proposal teams can absorb volume fluctuations." They can't. The dataset shows that performance collapses when volume per FTE rises beyond sustainable thresholds. Teams attempting to manage high bid loads without proportional capacity demonstrate the weakest win rates, regardless of maturity or experience. Structural overload, not effort, drives failure.

"Strong content equals strong strategy." Content quality alone does not differentiate winners. Adoption of content libraries or reuse systems shows only a weak relationship with win rate. High-performing teams win because they embed capture insights, customer intelligence, and defined win themes into their responses.

High Win, Mid Win & Low Win Cohorts by sample size

What Teams Must Do Differently

The findings point to five levers that account for a disproportionate share of win-rate variance. They are statistically meaningful drivers of improvement.

- Make bids structurally important
- Align volume to real capacity
- Create clear ownership and governance
- Focus on customer insight
- Automate boilerplate to protect strategic time

Across all insights, one conclusion stands out.

The teams that invest in structural excellence, capacity, customer insight, governance, and disciplined ownership, win more.

The Uncomfortable Truth

The future belongs to the organizations that build highly repeatable, insight-led, strategically governed bid engines capable of absorbing change, scaling volume, and consistently outperforming competitors.

Small improvements in win rate create outsized revenue impact, especially in organizations where RFPs drive 30 to 50 percent or more of total revenue. Even a single percentage point shift can mean millions. Yet most leadership teams continue to treat proposal operations as a back-office function rather than strategic revenue infrastructure.

This report provides the evidence to change that.
The data is unequivocal. Your operating model determines your win rate. Fix the structure, and execution can follow.

What This Report Reveals

The report is structured to move from diagnosis to intervention. Each chapter builds on the uncomfortable truths above and provides precise directives for improvement.

> *In working with over 200 companies moving to an AI First Approach, we've learned that the real advantage isn't simply automating content. It's what teams do with the time they get back. The winners use it to invest in their processes and provide more insightful responses.*

Jasper Cooper
Co-Founder and CEO of AutoRFP.ai

Chapter 1: Why Organizations Win or Lose examines the structural causes of performance variance. We reveal why capacity cliffs suppress win rates, why SME-led workflows backfire, why insight routines outperform content maturity, and how revenue dependence dictates process investment. The chapter closes with high-performer and low-performer archetypes, which reveal the repeatable patterns that define success and failure.

Chapter 2: Writing Winning Responses dissects content operations and automation. We show why content reuse correlates with higher win rates, how automation creates compound effects when combined with customer insights, and why defined win themes produce measurable uplifts in evaluator scoring. This chapter challenges the assumption that speed and volume are primary drivers of success.

Chapter 3: Future Outlook maps the emerging competitive landscape. We demonstrate why structural investment outperforms tooling, what high performers will look like, and why AI will magnify your structural gaps rather than close them. The chapter includes role-specific directives for proposal leaders, sales leaders, revenue leaders, and CFOs.

WHAT TODAY'S TEAMS REVEAL ABOUT THE MODERN PROPOSAL ENGINE

The Capacity Cliff

THE CAPACITY CLIFF
Many teams hold a common belief that high-volume teams can outperform through greater effort and "heroics."

DATA-BACKED TRUTH
The dataset reveals no linear relationship between team size (FTEs) and win rate. Instead, the strongest pattern is capacity fit or the alignment between RFP volume, team structure, qualification discipline, and process maturity.

Teams win because their operating model matches the demands of their proposal environment.

The nuance becomes clear when reviewing the volume–FTE combinations in the survey:

Low-volume teams (1–25 RFPs/year) with 1 FTE report the highest win rates in that segment. This is not an efficiency effect; it is a selectivity effect.

These organizations typically bid on warm, high-fit opportunities where customer insight is strong, relationships are established, and competition is limited.

A single proposal professional is not capacity-constrained because the organization is highly disciplined in qualification and operates within a narrow, insight-rich portfolio.

High-volume teams (151–500 RFPs/year) with 2–10 FTEs consistently outperform larger teams.

This reflects the emergence of dedicated, efficient proposal engines, or teams with clear ownership, structured SME engagement, defined customer insights, and governed content systems.

These mid-sized teams achieve the highest win rates in high-volume bands because they combine disciplined process with manageable complexity.

They scale quality alongside volume.

Larger teams (11–20+ FTEs) underperform because complexity grows faster than coherence.

These teams show lower average win rates across multiple volume bands.

They often absorb more "must-bid" low-fit RFPs, face increased compliance workload, experience slower decision cycles, and operate with diffuse ownership and inconsistent SMEs.

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The Capacity Cliff

This pattern holds across the broader dataset.

Overstretch predicts weak performance more reliably than maturity, AI usage, or content effort. But so does overcapacity applied to the wrong strategy.

The result is a U-shaped curve, where high performers cluster at "fit," not at the extremes.

NEW MODEL
Capacity should be understood as a strategic revenue variable, instead of an operational one.

Teams win more when capacity, qualification, insight, ownership, and process maturity are aligned. Teams lose when volume grows faster than the system can handle or when headcount grows faster than clarity, discipline, and strategic focus.

Teams lose because they lack headcount for the way they are operating.

Under-capacity isn't about FTE count, necessarily, but it's about exceeding the structural limits of your bid engine.

Once you cross that limit, win rates fall fast.

	1-25	26-50	51-150	151-500	500+
1	39%				
2-5	29%	39%	37%	46%	
6-10	32%	27%	28%	46%	
11-20	25%	38%	38%	12%	
21+			34%	38%	

Y axis: # of people directly involved in bids
X-axis: # of bids responded to per year
Cell is normalized win rate percentage
Note, 500+ did have results but n=2, therefore data was removed from report to maintain anonyminity.

The SME Collaboration Paradox

COMMON BELIEF
More SME involvement improves accuracy and therefore win rates.

DATA-BACKED TRUTH
SME-led drafting is one of the strongest predictors of low performance.

NEW MODEL
SMEs validate truth, but proposal teams design the narrative. This is imperative because teams where SMEs "own" first-draft writing show:

- Lower win rates
- Higher rewrite volume
- Greater inconsistency and compliance risk
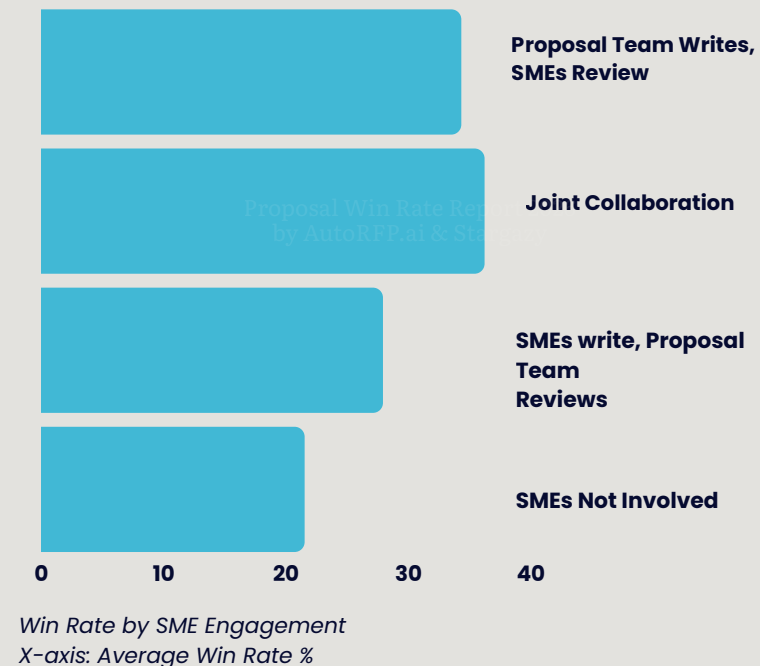- Frequent last-minute rework cycles

The data shows why, too.

SMEs write for precision, not persuasion. They prioritize completeness rather than competitive differentiation. Proposal teams then inherit a patchwork of styles, assumptions, and interpretations, which they must rewrite under deadline.

Although efficiency is most likely a stress lever for the proposal teams, the real risk is that it breaks the proposal's strategic voice.

DIRECTIVE
Move SMEs into structured validation roles and remove them from drafting by default.

Proposal Team Writes, SMEs Review

Joint Collaboration

SMEs write, Proposal Team Reviews

SMEs Not Involved

0   10   20   30   40

Win Rate by SME Engagement
X-axis: Average Win Rate %

Insight Processes Are the Most Underrated Predictor

COMMON BELIEF
Strong content and fast drafting are a primary drivers of win rate.

DATA-BACKED TRUTH
Content quality without strategic insight produces little performance lift.

NEW MODEL
Insight acts as the multiplier that determines whether content and process actually influence evaluator scoring.

Teams with strong insight routines outperform teams with similar content libraries and similar levels of AI usage. The differentiator is the clarity of understanding about the customer, the competition, and the decision criteria.

The absence of insight routines forces teams to draft without a coherent narrative, misalign with evaluator priorities, and revise late in the cycle to fix direction rather than polish messaging.

Insight is where performance diverges because content determines what you say; insight determines why it matters.

DIRECTIVE
Do not begin response drafting until insights are documented and approved.

Legend: ● 0–25% ● 26–50% ● 51–75% ● 76%+
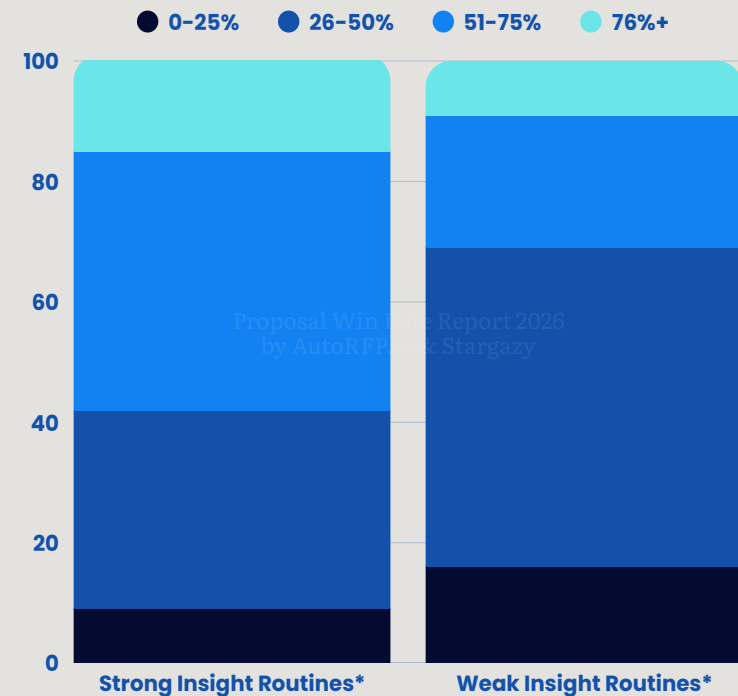
Win Rate by Insight Routines

*Strong = 2–3 insight routines present
Weak/None = 0–1 insight routines present

X-axis categories: Strong Insight Routines*   Weak Insight Routines*

The Proposal/Revenue Dependence Effect

COMMON BELIEF
Proposals are an operational activity that supports revenue.

DATA-BACKED TRUTH
Once proposals generate >30–50 percent of total revenue, the reverse is true; proposals are the revenue engine.

Revenue dependence on competitive bidding is not merely a reflection of past success.

Organizations that rely heavily on proposals invest more deeply in the structures that drive performance, such as dedicated ownership, capture discipline, governance, and capacity alignment. These structural characteristics, not revenue attribution alone, explain why high-dependence organizations consistently achieve higher win rates.

NEW MODEL
Revenue dependence should dictate process maturity.
The dataset shows that high-dependence organizations:
- Qualify more rigorously
- Enforce insight discipline earlier
- Maintain stronger governance
- Align more tightly with sales and product
- Experience significantly higher win rates

Low-dependence organizations tend to behave as though proposals are "back-office operations," as opposed to strategic revenue infrastructure, and their results reflect that mindset.

DIRECTIVE
If your organization crosses the 30–50 percent threshold, formalize proposal operations as a core revenue function, not a support function

● Win Rate %

Proposal Win Rate Report 2026 by AutoRFP.ai & Stargazy

Win Rate by RFP Revenue Contribution

x-axis: 0-10%, 11-25%, 26-50%, 51-75%, 75%+
y-axis: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50

The High Win Cohort

The High Win Cohort are not faster, and they don't go through midnight heroics to get proposals over the finish line.

A high win rate is the product of a repeatable operating model visible across sectors, volumes, and team sizes.

A proposal engine with a high win rate consistently exhibits:

- Sustainable bid volume
- Balanced team capacity
- Proposal-team-led drafting with SME validation
- Regular insight routines (research, win themes, capture)
- Clear governance and qualification discipline
- A business model where proposals meaningfully drive revenue
- Strong shortlist and win rates

This is the essence of structured advantage. It's the systematic design that enables repeatable success and high win rates.

DIMENSION	HIGH WIN COHORT
Proposal volume	71% respond to 26–500 proposals/year; only 12% handle 500+.
Team capacity	76% have 2–10 people directly involved in proposals
Content library maturity	59% use Content Library Automation
SME involvement model	94% use either "joint collaboration" or "proposal team writes, SMEs review". 6% report SMEs write, proposal team reviews.
Insight routines	88% have a defined customer-insight process; 71% use win themes; 71% do formal customer research.
Governance	71% have a Go/No-Go qualification step; 65% have formal review/governance; 53% have structured pursuit/capture before RFP
Revenue dependence on proposals	82% report >26% of company revenue from proposals, and 53% report ≥51%

The Low Win Cohort

Across the dataset, the Low Win Cohort share a consistent set of characteristics, including overloaded capacity, SME-led drafting, and low process maturity.

These patterns reveal why some teams struggle regardless of experience or tools. Each system is perfectly set up to hit the win rate it achieves.

A low-performance archetype follows a similar structure, including:

- High or unpredictable response volume
- Chronic FTE shortage
- SME-led drafting
- Inconsistent or absent insight routines
- High bespoke content percentage
- Weak governance
- Low revenue dependence comes from low investment
- Unstable and often poor performance

This is where many organizations recognise themselves, and yet it is where lower revenue win rates are prevalent.

DIMENSION	HIGH WIN COHORT
Proposal volume	39% respond to only 1–25 proposals/year; 25% do 26–50, 25% do 51–150, and 8% handle 151–500
Team capacity	79% have 2–10 people directly involved in proposals (47% in 2–5; 32% in 6-10)
Content library maturity	36% use Content Library Automation
SME involvement model	22% report "SMEs write, proposal team reviews"
Insight routines	67% say they have a defined customer-insight process 42% have defined win themes 50% do formal customer research
Governance	72% have a Go/No-Go qualification step 42% report formal review/governance 50% have structured pursuit/capture before RFP
Revenue dependence on proposals	36% report >26% of company revenue, 11% report ≥51%, Most (61%) sit at 0–25% revenue dependence.

The Performance Levers That Matter Most

While dozens of variables influence proposal outcomes, only a handful reliably shift win rates.

Winning more RFPs does not require wholesale transformation , either, just targeted intervention.

These levers represent the most statistically meaningful drivers of improvement.
- Balanced capacity
- SME validation, not SME authorship
- Insight-first workflow
- Mature content operations
- Structured governance

These levers account for a disproportionate share of performance variance.

Therefore, they form the new mental model for modern proposal operations.

Prioritise these five levers before expanding volume, adopting AI tools, or restructuring workflows.

High Win **Low Win**

Balanced Capacity

SME Validation

Insight-first Workflow

Mature Content Operations

Structured Governance

0   10   20   30   40
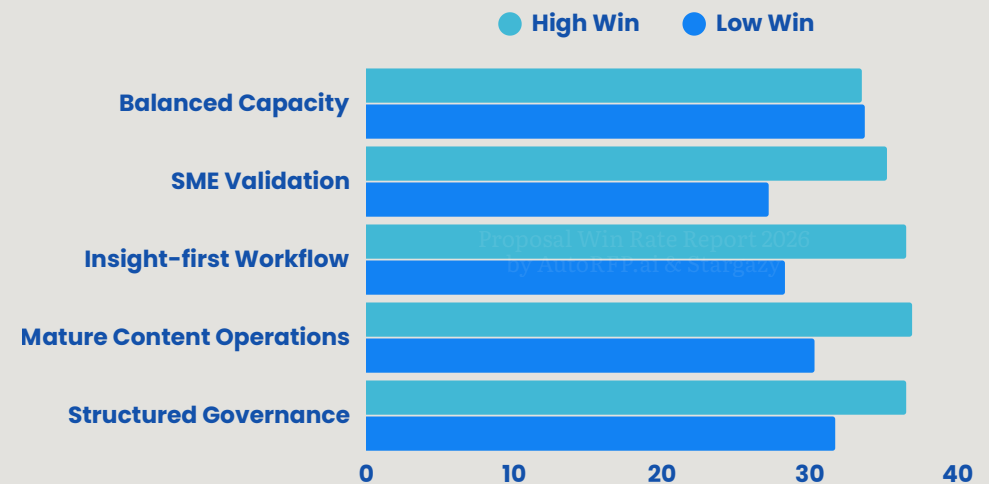
Adoption of performance levers across High Win and Low Win cohorts

Chapter 2

WRITING WINNING RESPONSES: NEW BEST PRACTICES ANY TEAM CAN ADOPT

Writing Winning Responses: New Best Practices Any Team Can Adopt

Many proposal teams assume that better writing leads directly to better win rates. They invest in stronger editors, tighter review cycles, and faster turnaround. The data suggests a more nuanced reality.

Writing quality matters, but content systems matter more.

Teams that manage content systematically through structured libraries and repeatable processes outperform teams that rely on manual search, outdated folders, or ad-hoc drafting.

Content automation does not independently guarantee higher win rates, but it plays a clear supporting role. Teams without automation are disproportionately represented in the lowest win-rate tier, while teams with automation show a noticeable upward shift across the performance spectrum.

CONTENT AUTOMATION AS THE UNLOCK & WHY LIBRARIES WITHOUT SYSTEMS REMAIN UNUSED

Content automation moves the numbers substantially. 51% of teams without content automation are present in the Low Win Cohort, whereas only 29% of teams with content automation are in the Low Win Cohort. The distribution shifts upward across the entire win-rate spectrum.

The differentiator is not the library alone. It is how the library connects to the rest of the operating model. High-performing teams combine content automation with customer insight, capture inputs, and clear win themes. This integration enables faster assembly, sharper messaging, and more consistent alignment with evaluator priorities.

Automation is not the legacy model of storing old proposals in a shared drive. It refers to structured repositories where content is searchable, governed, and accessible at the moment of drafting. When paired with insight processes and disciplined governance, automation frees teams to focus on analysis and persuasion, the parts of the response that actually change scoring.

"Previously, our content was disorganized and unruly. The largest factor in improving win rates, outside our product growing stronger, has been leveraging AI across our content. We now sell four product suites across 3 continents, without organization, chaos reigns."

Jake Phillpot
CEO at Workforce.com

Automation and Advanced Processes Correlate to Wins

Content automation refers to systems that surface relevant, pre-vetted responses based on RFP requirements without relying on outdated folders or manual search. Automation is about making the right content accessible at the moment of drafting.

Across the dataset, teams with content automation are less likely to fall into the lowest win-rate tier and show a modest upward shift across the performance distribution. While automation does not independently predict high win rates, it consistently supports better outcomes when paired with stronger structural elements.

The relationship with process maturity is equally telling. Teams reporting more mature and governed processes are more likely to use content automation as part of their operating model. Automation reinforces consistency, reduces manual load, and frees capacity for higher-value work such as insight development and narrative shaping.

High-performing teams frequently operate at the intersection of governed processes, customer insight, and content automation.

In these environments, automation functions as an amplifier. It strengthens execution quality and enables teams to concentrate on the strategic elements that evaluators reward.

Automation alone does not create winning responses, but automation embedded in a mature process is part of what differentiates high performers.
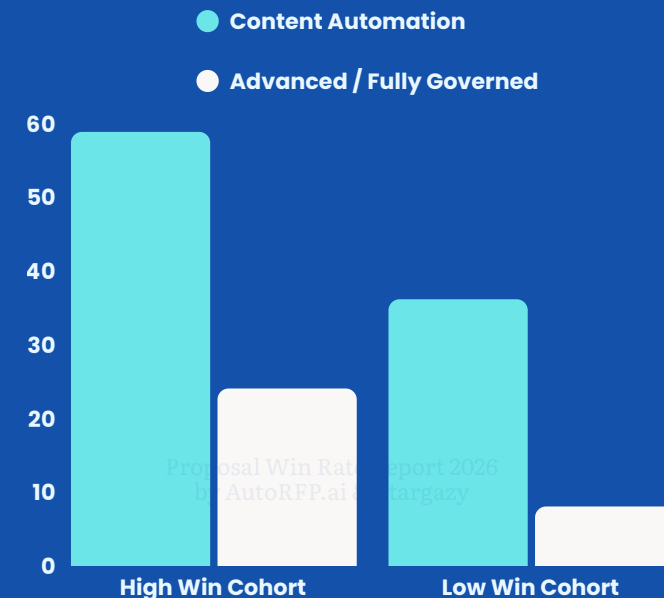
Legend:
- ● Content Automation
- ● Advanced / Fully Governed

Categories: High Win Cohort, Low Win Cohort

Average percentage ranking of each cohort across "What contributes the most to your win rate"
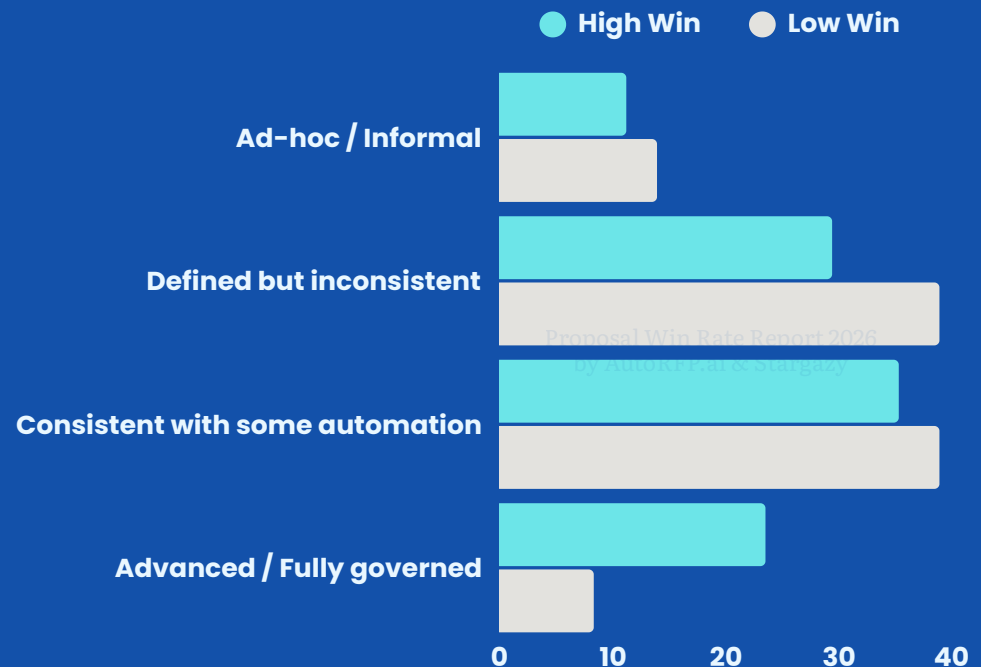
Lower Bespoke Rates Partenred with Higher Content Automation

Automation also drives reuse behavior on content. When teams automate their libraries, they actually use them. This isn't correlation, either. It's evidence that tooling enables behavioral change.

65% of the High Win Cohort use AI Proposal Tech.

Traditional content management systems require manual tagging, rigid taxonomies, and heroic librarian efforts to stay current. AI platforms help solve this by combining integration with understanding. A truly AI content library.

The High Win Cohort consistently rated their Process Maturity higher, and in the Advanced / Fully governed categorization. Diving into qualitative results for improving win rates across the sample, one driving factor which is common: **stronger processes.**

● **High Win** ● **Low Win**

- Ad-hoc / Informal
- Defined but inconsistent
- Consistent with some automation
- Advanced / Fully governed

0 10 20 30 40

Average percentage ranking of each cohort across "What contributes the most to your win rate"

What's Behind Teams That Improve Win Rates?

Qualitative results from question "If your win rate has changed, what do you believe is the top reason?"

The Proposal Win Survey included qualitative questions which provide insights behind improving win rates.

Teams that stated they had improving win rates chalked it up to the core themes we've seen in the differences between the Low Win Cohort and High Win Cohort in process:

- Content Automation
- Customer Insights
- Structured Process
- Better Quality Responses

This brings hope, in adopting the processes discussed in this report, that teams can see their win rates shift upwards.

"Better structure of documents and refined strategy."

"More competitive pricing, improved solution, improved bid attribute quality."

"Better answers and better insights / market knowledge."

"Knowing the customer better."

"Better processes around bids, more expertise."

"Qualification of pipeline."

The Compound Effect: Automation + Reuse + Insight

Why the triple capability creates separation.

The real performance advantage appears when teams combine three capabilities:

- Content library automation
- High reuse rates (50% or less bespoke content)
- Systematic customer insight processes

This group represents 19 respondents in the dataset. Their win-rate distribution differs sharply from everyone else. Only 16% sit in the low-win bands, compared to 47% of other teams. They're three times less likely to be stuck at the bottom of win-rate performance.

Their shortlist rates tell a complementary story. Among teams with all three capabilities, 63% report shortlist rates of 51% or higher. Other teams reach that threshold 45% of the time.

The High Win Cohort has implemented formal customer research processes 88% of the time. The Low Win Cohort do it 67% of the time. The gap isn't subtle. Teams that depend heavily on bid revenue prioritize these capabilities because they must. Over half of the High Win Cohort say more than 50% of company revenue depends on bids. Only 11% of low-win teams operate in that environment.

When bids are existential, organizations invest accordingly. Better process, higher rates of automation, more reuse of content and strong customer research; all drive greater wins. Combined, make you unstoppable.
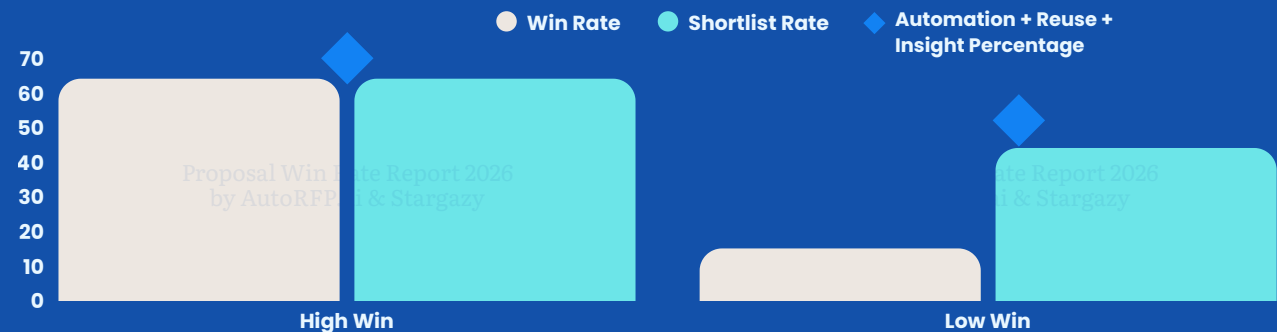
The Stakeholder Relationship Trap

Relationships Help You Win Access. Insight Helps You Win.

Across qualitative responses, one pattern appeared consistently. Teams that cite "stakeholder relationships" as their primary win driver tend to emphasise relationships instead of systematic content development or customer-insight processes.

This mindset is understandable. If success is attributed to familiarity and trust, investing in structured libraries or insight routines can appear unnecessary.

But the data suggests this belief creates strategic risk. Relationships do matter — they enable access, create early credibility, and help teams understand the customer's environment. What they do not do is win competitive procurements on their own.

In formal evaluation processes, procurement teams are required to justify selections to stakeholders who may have no prior relationship with the vendor.

Evaluators look for substantiation, specificity, and technical credibility.

Relationship strength without evidence or insight does not survive these requirements.

The highest-performing teams understand this distinction. The High Win Cohort ranks customer insight as a top win driver at nearly four times the rate of the Low Win Cohort. They treat relationships as a channel for gathering insight and not as a substitute for it. Relationships help them uncover motivations, constraints, evaluation criteria, and competitive dynamics. They then convert that information into clear win themes, relevant solutions, and evidence-supported narratives.

The Low Win Cohort tends to stop at the relationship.

The High Win Cohort uses the relationship to build the insight that actually wins.
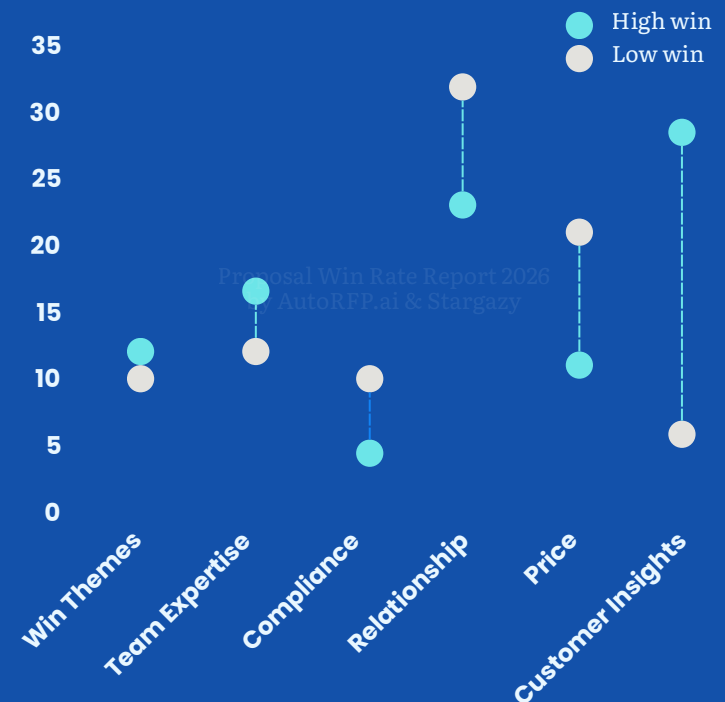
Average percentage ranking of each cohort across "What contributes the most to your win rate"

Final Point: Content Systems Create Capacity for Strategy

Content systems don't eliminate the need for customization or strategic thinking. They create capacity for it.

The High Win Cohort still invest heavily in understanding customer needs, crafting differentiated win themes, and adapting responses to specific contexts. The difference is they do this on a foundation of proven, reusable content rather than drafting everything from scratch.

The best proposal is still the one that demonstrates deepest customer understanding and most credible solution fit. Content automation doesn't write that proposal for you. It removes the obstacles that prevent you from focusing on those critical elements.

Teams that figure this out will increasingly separate from those that don't. The organizations that continue treating every RFP as a bespoke writing exercise will find themselves unable to respond to the volume of opportunities their markets present.

High-maturity teams will scale their response volume while maintaining or improving win rates because their systems enable parallel pursuit of multiple opportunities without linear increases in effort.

Chapter 3

THE FUTURE OUTLOOK OF WINNING TEAMS

The next two years will be uncomfortable for organizations that continue treating proposal work as a tactical function.

The data is unequivocal. The strongest predictors of win rate are structural, including team capacity, insight routines, SME workflow, and governance.

Win rate success is not tied to speed of response.

As AI becomes ubiquitous, the organizations that win will be those that invest in capability, instead of convenience.

The theme running through this outlook is simple. Winning teams focus on process.

ROI of Process Improvements

Why structural investment outperforms tooling every time

Most leadership teams struggle to quantify the financial return of improving proposal operations. Yet the dataset makes a compelling commercial case that small improvements in win rate create outsized revenue impact, especially in organizations where RFPs drive 30–50 percent or more of total revenue.

The key points this report found are:

- Win themes mean measurable uplifts in evaluator scoring
- Teams that formalise win themes early improve shortlist probability and secure several percentage points of win-rate uplift.
- In revenue terms, even a single percentage point shift can mean millions.
- Automation and insight routines mean higher shortlist conversions
- Automation requires insight for accelerating in the right direction.
- Teams that combine both automation and insight increase shortlist rates, a powerful predictor of revenue for late-stage win rate.
- Headcount justified through capacity cliffs
- Adding one FTE can prevent a capacity cliff that otherwise suppresses performance across every RFP for the rest of the quarter.
- The ROI here is compounding.

DIRECTIVE
Reframe proposal investment as pipeline protection and revenue drive instead of an operational cost.

ACTION	FORMULA	YOUR ORG
Proposals per year		
Average contract value (ACV)		
Annual RFP pipeline	Proposals per year X ACV	
Current win rate (%)		
Annual RFP revenue at current win rate	Step 3 X Step 4	
Value of 1 win-rate point	Step 3 x 1%	

Recommendations by Role

Precise, non-negotiable actions that different leaders must take.

BID / PROPOSAL LEADERS

Build a structurally sound proposal engine. Your priorities must include:

- Setting a strict volume-per-FTE limit
- Moving SMEs into validation-only workflows
- Implementing a non-optional insight routine before drafting
- Maturing content governance before expanding automation
- Escalating capacity risks directly to revenue leadership

SALES LEADERS

Shift from late-stage collaboration to co-ownership of strategy as early as possible. Your priorities must include:

- Transferring customer and competitive intelligence early
- Aligning qualification rigorously with proposal capacity
- Co-developing win themes before kickoff
- Treating proposal teams as equal partners in revenue generation

CFOS

Anchor investment decisions in probabilistic revenue math. Your priorities must include:

- Evaluating FTE additions based on avoided capacity cliffs
- Modelling win-rate uplifts as revenue yield, not cost savings
- Distinguishing between tooling-as-efficiency and tooling-as-strategy
- Requiring clear, structured insight and governance frameworks before funding AI expansion

REVENUE LEADERS (CRO/COO)

Redesign the operating model to reflect revenue dependence should you wish to grow revenue. Your priorities must include:

- If >30 percent of revenue comes from RFPs, elevate proposals to a strategic function
- Fund headcount and governance in proportion to revenue risk
- Monitor shortlist rate as a leading indicator of pipeline health
- Treat proposal system design as part of GTM architecture

AI's Role: Common Among Winners, But Not the Differentiator

The misconception that will define the next wave of competitive advantage

A surface-level reading of the data suggests that AI tools are associated with stronger bid outcomes. Two-thirds of the highest-performing organizations in the sample, 65 percent of the top-win-rate cohort, report using AI proposal technology in their workflow.

That figure appears compelling but must be contrasted with adoption levels among the rest of the survey population.

Across all respondents, 49 percent report using AI. Among non–top performers, the adoption rate is 46 percent. The gap exists, but it is modest.

Statistically, it is insufficient to distinguish winners from average performers.

This pattern is reinforced in the underlying metrics:
- Spearman correlation between AI adoption and win rate: $\rho = 0.00$ ($p = 0.98$)

- Multivariate logistic regression: AI tool adoption shows no independent predictive power once structural and process variables are introduced

- Odds ratio: approximately 1.1, with a non-significant confidence interval

The conclusion is not that AI lacks strategic potential. Rather, AI is being deployed into systems whose underlying operating models often remain under-developed.

In most organizations surveyed:
- Process maturity sits in the midrange: 41 percent report "consistent but partly automated" workflows

- Strategic elements such as win themes and customer research show only partial penetration (52 and 54 percent adoption, respectively)

- Governance is uneven, with 50 percent reporting formal review structures

- Team organization is fragmented: 44 percent run bids as a shared responsibility within sales or marketing

- Content remains heavily bespoke: 45 percent of respondents produce 50–80 percent custom material for each bid

AI's Role: Common Among Winners, But Not the Differentiator

When these conditions persist, the introduction of AI accelerates the velocity of output without materially improving its strategic quality. Drafting speeds increase, but differentiation does not. The dataset suggests that many teams are applying advanced tools to workflows that were not competitive before the tool was introduced.

By contrast, the strongest predictors of high performance are structural and behavioral:

- Revenue dependence on bids is the most powerful single correlate of win rate ($\rho = 0.40$, $p < 0.001$)

- Bid volume shows a significant positive association, even after controls (+4 percentage points in win rate per volume band; $p = 0.019$)

- Team organization is materially associated with outcomes; dedicated or specialised bid teams are far more prevalent among top performers (Cramér's V = 0.36)

- Defined win themes correlate strongly with shortlist performance ($\rho = 0.28$, $p = 0.008$)

In other words, structural capability differentiates high-performing bid organizations. AI is widely adopted among strong performers, but it is not what makes them outperform. Instead, high performers tend to adopt AI as part of a broader operating philosophy grounded in discipline, ownership, and strategic clarity. The tool amplifies their system; it does not replace it.

IMPLICATION FOR LEADERS
The evidence indicates that the next competitive advantage in proposal work will not come from adopting AI tools in isolation. It will come from building operating environments in which AI can meaningfully influence quality, coherence, and differentiation.

For organizations with weak capture discipline, fragmented ownership, and inconsistent governance, AI will increase throughput while leaving underlying win rates unchanged. For organizations with a defined structure and a mature process architecture, AI will compound existing advantages and widen the performance gap.

As AI models evolve, this divergence is likely to accelerate. Leaders should therefore view AI adoption not as a discrete investment in technology, but as a complement to and multiplier of the organization's structural and strategic readiness.

The Emerging "Capture-to-Proposal Engine"

What high performers will look like in 2026–2027

The future of winning proposals should not be focusing on a better drafting software because that won't change an outcome.

Teams that focus on a continuous, insight-driven engine that integrates capture, content, governance, and AI into a single system will overwhelming outperform competitors in RFP sales cycles.

This data isn't making a prediction of proposal teams. This data has surfaced the minimum standard emerging right now.

Based on our data, high performers will build:

- Continuous insight flow. Customer, competitor, and evaluator intelligence flowing into every opportunity.

- Contextual content retrieval. Systems that surface relevant, accurate, context-aware content as opposed to static libraries.

- Layered governance. Review sequences tailored to sector, compliance risk, and deal size.

- AI and human hybrid quality control. AI accelerates drafting, whilst humans make sure the narrative, truthfulness, and differentiation is taken care of.

- Sector-aware qualification models. Different rules for GovCon, AEC, banking, insurance, and SaaS need to be taken into account, as this is not one-size-fits-all system.

Conclusion: Structural Advantage Wins

The data demonstrates a simple but strategically important truth: technology does not outperform structure. AI tools are now widely adopted, including by two-thirds of the highest-performing teams , but AI alone does not explain why some organizations consistently win while others stagnate. What differentiates performance is the strength of the underlying operating model into which AI is deployed.

Across the dataset, the strongest predictors of high win rates are revenue dependence on bids, bid volume, team organization, and disciplined early-cycle practices such as capture, customer insight, and win-theme definition. These structural features exert more influence on outcomes than any individual tool. AI creates leverage only when these foundations are already in place.

For leaders, the implication is clear. The next era of proposal performance will be won by organizations that align investment in technology with investment in process ownership, strategic coherence, and organizational design.

Underdeveloped systems will see AI increase speed without raising win rates. Mature systems will see AI raise both. The firms that will define best-in-class performance over the next decade are those that:

- Treat bidding as a core commercial function, not an administrative one
- Build dedicated or clearly owned proposal teams
- Institutionalise capture, customer research, and win-theme discipline
- Establish governance that improves accuracy, consistency, and narrative clarity
- Deploy AI to amplify these capabilities rather than compensate for their absence

Conclusion: Structural Advantage Wins

CHRISTINA CARTER

The strategic message is not to slow down on AI adoption.

It is to sequence it correctly.

AI should be the accelerator, not the engine. As the technology advances, organizations with strong bid architectures will widen the gap on both efficiency and competitiveness. Those without such foundations risk institutionalizing "faster sameness."

Winning in the AI era requires organizational readiness, process maturity, and strategic intent. Technology multiplies performance. It does not create it.

Thank you

We hope you enjoyed the 2026 Proposal Win Rate Report.

Thank you to the bid managers who contributed to this report. Without your support and your openness in sharing how you win, this report would not be possible.

This report was a collaboration between AutoRFP.ai and Stargazy. Thank you to both teams in preparing the report and crunching the numbers.

For our audience, we hope you found at least one valuable takeaway that can help you improve your win rates. Our goal, to give you - the bid teams who spend the your days and nights winning in the complex world of bids - data to back the change you want to make.

Until next time, thank you.

CHRISTINA CARTER

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Interested in learning more about how AutoRFP.ai can help you win RFPs?

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Stargazy

Keen to join the fastest growing Bid Manager community and discuss how to win more RFPs?

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Methodology & Definitions

This report is based on an online survey of 94 completed responses from bid and proposal professionals. All figures refer to this sample only and are descriptive, not a census of the entire market. The questionnaire covered company context, team and structure, process and tools, and performance indicators, including the questions "What your approximate bid win rate over the past 12 months?" and "What's your shortlist rate (% of bids that reach the next stage)?" as the core outcome measures.

For the analysis, we worked directly from the raw response data exported. Our main cohorts that is used consistently throughout the report are the Win Cohorts (Low, Medium, High) based on bands from "What your approximate bid win rate over the past 12 months?".

All percentages are unweighted and calculated on valid answers to each question (excluding blanks and "not sure"). For multi-select questions we report the share of respondents who selected each option at least once; for ranking questions (such as "Rank the top factors that most influence your wins.") we focus on what each cohort most frequently ranked #1, and where useful, the broader top-3 pattern.

Finally, relationships we highlight between variables (for example, between content automation, reuse, and win rate) are grounded in this dataset and should be read as indicative patterns in this sample, not as definitive causal proof. We do not publish respondent-level data; results are shown only in aggregate, and we avoid reporting on very small subgroups where individuals could be inferred. As a self-selected, self-reported sample, the findings are best used as a directional benchmark and source of practical ideas for improving proposal performance, rather than a statistically representative view of every bid team.

This report draws on a self-selected sample of 94 completed responses from bid and proposal professionals. Respondents include both AutoRFP.ai customers and non-customers: the survey was open to the broader bid community and promoted via email invitations, LinkedIn social posts and the Stargazy online community forum. As with the methodology, all figures in this section describe this sample only and should be read as indicative, not as a census of the whole market.

In broad terms, respondents are experienced practitioners working on material deals for their organisations: most sit in dedicated bid teams, report into sales leadership, and work in companies where a meaningful share of revenue depends on winning RFPs.

In this sample:
- Company size (n = 91): Roughly two-thirds work in small–to-mid-sized organisations with ≤300 employees, and around one-third in larger enterprises with 300+ employees.
- Who they are (n = 91): About half identify as bid/proposal managers, with most of the remainder in sales/business development, marketing/operations, or executive leadership roles.
- Who they sell to (n = 92): The sample is balanced across sectors: about 4 in 10 teams mainly pursue public-sector work, 4 in 10 bid into a mix of public and private, and just under a quarter focus mostly on private-sector RFPs.
- Bid team size (n = 89): Bid teams are typically lean: around 8 in 10 respondents say 2–10 people are directly involved in bids, with only a small minority reporting 20+ participants.
- Reporting line (n = 83): The bid function most commonly reports into a Sales Leader, followed by a dedicated Bid Leader; fewer teams report into marketing, pre-sales or operations.
- Commercial stakes (n = 89–90): RFPs are financially important: a majority report that at least a quarter of company revenue depends on bids, and around 7 in 10 are working on opportunities with typical annual contract values above $100,000.

Methodology & Definitions

1.0 Single Question Measures

1.1 Bid Volume
Bid Volume is the annual number of bids a team responds to, from:
"How many bids do you respond to each year?"
(n = 91)

1.1.1 High-volume teams
Respondents who selected "151–500" or "500 +" to "How many bids do you respond to each year?" (n = 13).

1.1.2 Low-volume teams
Respondents who selected "1–25" to "How many bids do you respond to each year?" (n = 29).

1.2 Team Capacity
Team Capacity is the number of people directly involved in bids, from:
"How many people are directly involved in bids?"
(n = 89)

1.3 SME Involvement
SME Involvement comes from:
"How do Subject-Matter Experts contribute?"
(n = 91)

1.3.1 SME-led drafting
Respondents who selected "SMEs write, bid team reviews" (n = 16).

1.3.2 SME validation model
Respondents who selected "Bid team writes, SMEs review" (n = 38).

1.4 Process Maturity
Process Maturity is self-rated from:
"How would you rate your overall process maturity?"
with four options: Ad-hoc / informal, Defined but inconsistent, Consistent with some automation, Advanced / fully governed.
(n = 91)

1.4.1 Advanced / fully governed
Respondents who selected "Advanced / fully governed" (n = 10).

1.5 Proposal Process
Steps Involved in Bid Process are taken from the multi-select question:
"Which of the following does your proposal process include?"
Base sample for this question is n = 94. Each step below is coded as yes/no depending on whether respondents selected that option.

1.5.1 Structured Pursuit / Capture
Structured Pursuit / Capture indicates whether respondents selected "Structured Pursuit/Capture before RFP" in this question (n = 48).

1.5.2 Go / No-Go Qualification
Go / No-Go Qualification indicates whether respondents selected "Go/No Go Qualification" (n = 65).

1.5.3 Customer Research
Customer Research indicates whether respondents selected "Customer Research" (n = 51).

1.5.4 Defined Win Themes
Defined Win Themes indicates whether respondents selected "Defined Win Themes" (n = 49).

1.5.5 Governance
Governance indicates whether respondents selected "Formal Review or Governance" (n = 47).

1.5.6 Content Automation
Content Automation is a binary split based on whether respondents selected "Content Library Automation" (n = 45 with automation, n = 49 without).

1.5.7 AI Proposal Tech
AI Proposal Tech indicates whether respondents selected "AI Proposal Tech" as part of their process (n = 45).

Methodology & Definitions

1.6. Revenue Dependence on Bids
Revenue Dependence on Bids is the share of company revenue tied to RFPs, from:
"What percentage of company revenue depends on bids?"
(n = 89).

1.6.1 High-dependence organizations
Respondents who selected "51–75 %" or "76 % +" to "What percentage of company revenue depends on bids?" (n = 24).

2.0 Composite constructs (multi-question)
These combine two or more of the measures above.

2.1 Balanced Capacity
Balanced Capacity is the ratio of Bid Volume to Team Capacity, combining:

- "How many bids do you respond to each year?" and
- "How many people are directly involved in bids?"
(n = 89)

2.2 Insight-first Workflow
Insight-first Workflow indicates whether teams build customer insight before or alongside drafting, using:

- Selections for "Customer Research" and "Defined Win Themes" in "Which of the following does your proposal process include?", and
- "When you receive an RFP, do you have a process for discovering customer insights from previous engagements?"
(n = 92)

2.3 Structured Governance
Structured Governance reflects the presence of multiple formal steps in the proposal process, combining selections for:

- "Structured Pursuit/Capture before RFP"
- "Go/No Go Qualification"
- "Formal Review or Governance"
- in "Which of the following does your proposal process include?"
(n = 94)

2.4 Mature Content Operations
Mature Content Operations describe how structured and repeatable a team's content system is, combining:
- "Content Library Automation" in "Which of the following does your proposal process include?",
- "Roughly what % of a typical bid is bespoke vs reused content?", and
- "How would you rate your overall process maturity?"
Analyses use respondents who answered the bespoke-vs-reuse and process-maturity questions (n = 89).

2.5 Insight Routines
Insight Routines describe the regular practices teams use to generate and apply customer insight, combining:
- "Customer Research" and "Defined Win Themes" from "Which of the following does your proposal process include?", and
- "When you receive an RFP, do you have a process for discovering customer insights from previous engagements?"
(n = 92)

Methodology & Definitions

3.0 Cohort Definitions

3.1 Win Cohorts
Win cohorts are based on responses to the survey question: "What your approximate bid win rate over the past 12 months?". (n=90)

3.1.1. High Win Cohort
The High Win Cohort includes respondents who selected "51–75 %" or "76 % +" in answer to "What your approximate bid win rate over the past 12 months?". n = 17 respondents.

3.1.2. Medium Win Cohort
The Medium Win Cohort includes respondents who selected "26–50 %" for "What your approximate bid win rate over the past 12 months?". n = 37 respondents.

3.1.3. Low Win Cohort
The Low Win Cohort includes respondents who selected "0–10 %" or "11–25 %" for "What your approximate bid win rate over the past 12 months?". n = 36 respondents.